

AUROVILLE TODAY

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August, 1991

Now that it is over, it is possible to look back, perhaps from a calmer perspective. August in Auroville breaks in half because the fifteenth is always such an intense focus in the collective rhythm, with anticipation and preparation during the first half and non-stop events in the second. In addition, this year we had extensive meetings of the Auroville Foundation Governing Board, and even a public hearing on the state of India's environment.

Visitors, meetings, and cultural events can usually be taken in our stride. But the unique, overwhelming fact about this August was simply "the room"; the Matrimandir's Inner Chamber, the room, would be open. A burst of activity made it possible on the fifteenth, and although the Matrimandir is not finished, the room is not finished, enough was here for an opening. For many this overshadowed all other events; some even thought the traditional dawn bonfire should be cancelled.

With the first light of the fifteenth, while the last of the bonfire collapsed into embers, the first groups were admitted to Matrimandir. All day long until seven at night Aurovilians and visitors went up to the room until seven at night. They went up the slope of the curved ramp, through a screened wooden door, through a marble door into the room.

What happens to a person when he steps into a huge twelve-sided room of white marble with twelve columns disappearing into the roof, and a ray of light shining down on the center?

**People will be allowed in to
concentrate –
(Mother laughs)
to learn how to concentrate!**

(L' Agenda de Mère XI, 3 January 1970)

What happened to me at first was an unexpected sense of all the people who had in some way contributed to Matrimandir by wanting it to be. Memories came of the countless people who worked on the structure or even just visited or wrote a letter. I saw again all the old photographs of the last twenty-one years, beginning from August 14, 1970, when a group gathered around a little pond near the Banyan Tree for the first dedication, then the beginning of the excavation on February 21, 1971 and on and on through years of apparent impossibilities. Faces from photographs kept coming. Even materials seemed present as part of the participation – why did I think of the Vietnamese and Korean cement that we had sometimes used? Everything that had said, "Yes it must be," everyone who did it, was there making it real now.

The crystal was not in place as hoped because the stand had not arrived back from gold-plating in Bombay. To have had the crystal in place might have been too much. Nobody will ever know, but a week later it was suddenly, without notice, in place on a temporary stand.

Again another order of magnitude in the energy field, a pure center reflecting only light. Whatever or however one may reflect on the symbolism, the effect on the body is profound. The feeling is one of clarification, even of purification that happens directly. The accuracy of this description, of course, can only be verified individually, the potential of the room is unknown.

August, 1991 is over, but what happened seems to be the beginning of another time. The room is open.

Bill



Photo John Mandeon

*"A formless stillness called, a nameless Light.
Above him was the white immobile Ray,
Around him the eternal Silences."*

Savitri II, i, 246-8

WHY AM I HERE?

Four Aurovilian women recently came back from a short visit to their respective countries in the West. All of them have been in Auroville for 13 years or more, living happily in keet huts and riding bicycles over the desert-like roads of Auroville. Now they are all around forty and two of them have a family. Were they happy to return to Auroville life? *Auroville Today* wanted to know what they felt.

Of course they all love India, and Auroville. But...

"I went to the market in Pondy, and suddenly I felt I was suffocating—there were too many people around me, it was hot, there were beggars tugging at my arm. It made me dream of being in a place where I could quietly buy everything I need for the week..."

Another lady jumped in:

"During the past 15 years, the number of people in the streets has tripled, the road to Pondy is filling up with cars, buses and motorbikes all emitting lots of smoke and noise and dust. How will it be in another 15 years?"

They nodded, all four of them. "Yes, we know that!" In fact they had been going to Pondy every week, for many years. And coming to a supermarket in the West after a few years of Pondy market can be a real shock, but it does spoil you for a while. And three months of modern comforts and a pleasant climate do make you feel a lot more energetic! And hasn't there now and then been this secret moment when they asked themselves, "Why go through all this again, why am I here?"



The ladies served themselves another cup of tea on the terrace of the newly built Merriam Hill Guest House. It was a pleasant afternoon. Ideas bubbled up on how to improve things in Auroville.

"The focus, the yoga here is work, and yet the conditions in which we have to do our work are often so difficult! We women suffer more from this than the men, I believe. It was the women who asked for a shop in Auroville. It's the kind of thing we women can make happen. We can try to change the conditions, act upon them, make daily life beautiful, organize it... There are so many things men don't even think of because they don't usually have to cook, bring up kids, etc. which is so difficult here.

"I don't mean to say that we should take Auroville to the West, but we should not forget the material quality which is possible in the West, and try to bring it here"

And now the crucial question. Are the material difficulties a reason to consider leaving Auroville?

The question made them pause. Finally it came. "No." It sounded heartfelt.

And one of them explained:

"When I came to the inner chamber of the Matrimandir, on the 15th of August, I suddenly 'saw' or felt a lightness, a sense of a new world being present there. And what came to me in words was the following: 'The material perfection of the West is one side of a coin. The other is poverty and squalor. What wants to manifest is a world which is beyond these two opposites'. After a few days I started to remember this vibration of lightness, and whenever I remembered this, I could take all the material inconveniences without getting depressed about them."

Tea was finished. All left, to do some shopping...



"Nothing moves... and everything moves"

In 1989, having spent several years in Pondicherry at the Cluny School, Jean Michel and Claire decided to step into the experience of Auroville. Since then they have lived at Aspiration. They have both taught at different schools in Auroville, including 'Transition' and 'Mirramukhi'.

Now they are back from their country, France, where they spent two and a half

months. We asked them about their impressions of Auroville.

Claire: I had already been to France last year, and this year I had the impression I was more mature with regard to coming back to Auroville. I was coming back; that was clear and quiet. And Aspiration is rather good to come back to. After coming back, I have a two-sided impression: nothing moves, and at

the same time everything moves. The changes are very slow. Daily life seems always the same and yet there is a constant movement. Yes, there's really a feeling of a rather massive immobility, something rounded that turns and is full of little changes . . . very subtle.

In Europe you get the impression of a permanent dynamism that one doesn't always find here, but at the same time you notice that the structures there are so heavy. You find there a certain inertia like in India, and sometimes in Auroville.

Jean Michel: On the material level, we liked to be back in our huts! It's one aspect of the life here that we don't mind at all.

AVToday: You are both 30, and you have a daughter, Lauriane, who is five. How do you explain the fact that so few young people are attracted to come and live in Auroville?

Jean-Michel: I think that, in the first place, Auroville is not known well enough in the world, especially among the youth.

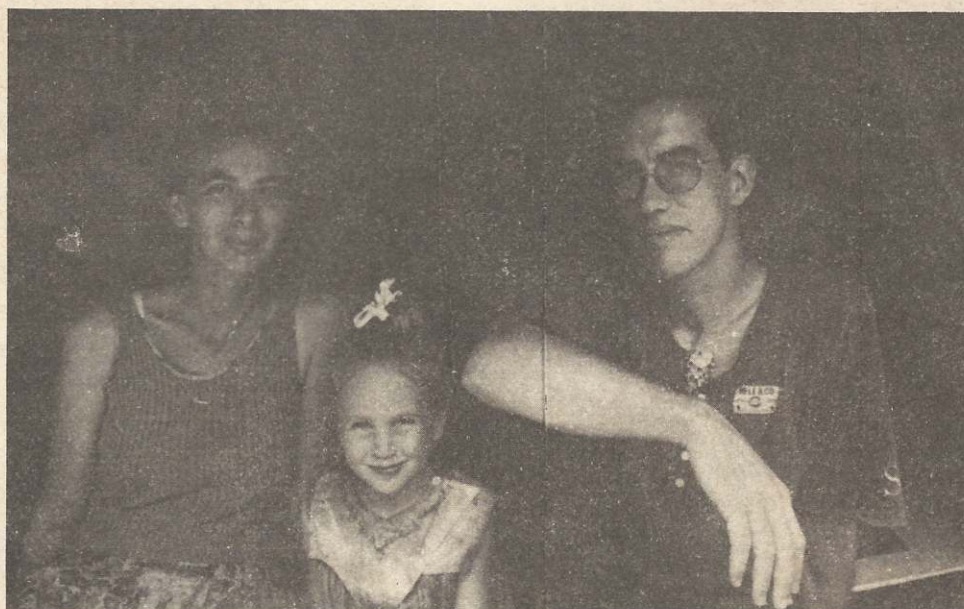
Claire: On the other hand some do arrive, knowing about Auroville, but with so many preconceived ideas that they can't stand the confrontation with reality. They have a kind of eagerness to live another kind of life without really wanting to take responsibility for themselves.

AVToday: Does Auroville for you remain unique in spite of all the changes taking place in the world at this moment?

Claire: Surely, because of all the parameters Auroville presents. Auroville obviously is unique, but it shouldn't become locked in, or elitist. Auroville is such a patchwork – even if the aim is more or less the same for everybody – that you can't easily analyse, categorise or study it or make prognoses. Auroville escapes observers, and maybe us too.

Jean Michel: And this may be the reason why people don't come in bigger numbers. Auroville makes them afraid, escapes them. It is very difficult to define Auroville, grasp it as a totality.

Yanne



Claire, Lauriane and Jean-Michel at home in Aspiration

'It was the Crystal calling'

Recently, three long-term friends and supporters of Auroville in the U.S.A. – June Maher, Jack Alexander and Julian Lines – revisited us after a break of three years. *Auroville Today* interviewed them one afternoon amid rain showers and biscuits.

AVToday: What brings you back here?

June: I had a strong feeling, you could call it an *adesh* (inner command—Eds.), that now was the time to come – to be here for August 15th. It's as simple as that.

Jack: I'm mid-life crisising – which means essentially I am looking for a new direction. I'm frustrated by being forced to earn a living by doing something that's not Auroville-related, and I'm here to collect information and ideas about how I can change this when I return. This is the rational reason I hang on my coming here. But it's also something inner – *adesh* is a good word.



Julian

Julian: It was a sense of the crystal calling. Of course, I had to surrender it completely and say it's not going to be in position this trip. Then 'puf' it was suddenly there in position in the Chamber. Incredible!

AVToday: In comparison with your last visit, what do you feel is moving in Auroville at the moment, and what could do with more energy?

June: The first thing that struck me this time was a sense of material plenitude. Auroville is anchored now, something very solid and deep is carrying it along. I also sense a yearning to come together more collectively – the Central Fund is a big step here.

On the other side, regarding education, I feel from both the teachers and the older kids a need for renewed enthusiasm and direction.

Jack: Aurovilians have sure got a better sense of humour now. And there's less feeling of constant, life-threatening crises and more a feeling that you are learning how to be a community that includes diversity. At the Governing Board meetings, I was also struck by the variety and quantity of the opportunities for Auroville's growth that are stacking up now. This is something completely new. As for what needs more energy – I don't see dormancy. But I see many people who are overworked, because you still don't have enough people here.

Julian: In comparison with 1974, when I lived here, people smile more now, their hearts are more open, there's a sense of lightness. Nothing's wrong or out of place here, except the old reflexes – like believing money is the answer or trying to keep everything in the Foundation. By letting go of these ideas, we'll move to a different level of prosperity.



June

AVToday: What for you is the relevance, the uniqueness, of Auroville?

June: It's the integralness of it. Other places may be doing wonderful greenwork or education projects, but they are not at the same time trying to work it out with money, with relationships, with collective living and so on, and they are not living a life dealing with ordinary things while remembering there is something else behind. That's the uniqueness of Auroville.

Jack: If you think of Auroville as a being, you can see that Auroville has always behaved like a child or young adult of the same age. At one time it was very unruly. Now it's growing up, it's learning how to solve problems, have more effective meetings, plant trees. All these things had to be discovered one by one. There is no handbook or guide. But if you look at the composite whole that is Auroville now, I'm convinced there's no other place like it – and that's what makes it worth the difficulty of being part of it.

Julian: Auroville is not a fad. People have been born here, have died here. It represents a level of commitment that's not so

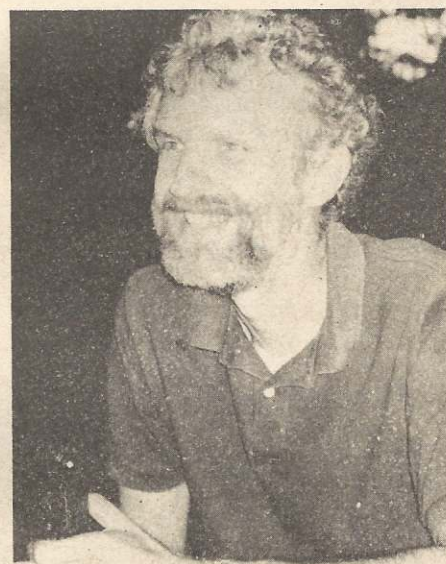
common in the world. And continually you are taken by surprise. Like going into the Chamber, for example. I expected something very profound and concentrated that would change the world. And what do you see? You see yourself upside down in this glass sphere, with clouds and weather. It's not some abstract, severe thing. I think this is really what's behind all this Gaian, holistic perspective – to see the miracle that's here, minute by minute, in everything that's happening.

AVToday: Why then are you not living here?

Julian: It's not just happening here. Sri Aurobindo and Mother are for the whole world. Also, in terms of one's personal life, it can be difficult. For example, if your partner is not willing to be in Auroville and if you really want the best education for your child it's hard to be here.

June: In 1976, when I came and stayed here almost a year, I went through a series of illnesses. One time, in a convalescent home, I had a clear sense of a hand picking me up, taking me across and putting me in America. But I also know that all this can change, and that one day I could be living here again.

Jack: In 1977 I left Auroville, and the next seven years were anguish for me. Being in America was like being in a wasteland – I felt completely unconnected with Auroville. Then in 1984 I returned for a visit, and discovered in a very profound way that I had never left. Everything was familiar, and I connected with people immediately. So get-



Jack

ting on the plane a few weeks later was no great deal as I discovered I could be anywhere without losing that connection. And of course there's a whole lot of vital Auroville work that has to happen in America.

Interview by Alan and Yanne

We apologize for the shrunken state of the last issue. We hope no one ruined their eyes on the small print.

This was due to some failures in communication that we hope will not happen again.

the Great Return as long-term friends and the West, emerge pale and plump from dusty more in our midst, the sun flashing off new teeth.

– of jet-lag, erratic biorhythms and linguistic those first few weeks when the outlines are still fresh and to re-examine old altitudes, habits returnees back? What do they see here? And what can challenge or nurture us?

of their responses, responses that range from its own way, illumines some fragment of the Auroville Experience'.

LISA is 16 years old and comes from the north-west of the USA. Three weeks ago she arrived in 'Aspiration'.

"My parents have some friends who visited Auroville. They came over to our home and they showed the video *Earth Needs...* and I was really interested in it. I was thinking about being in either India or Africa for the next four years because I was becoming bored with the American education system – I thought I might eventually want to do some service or environmental work in the Third World. So I thought it would be good

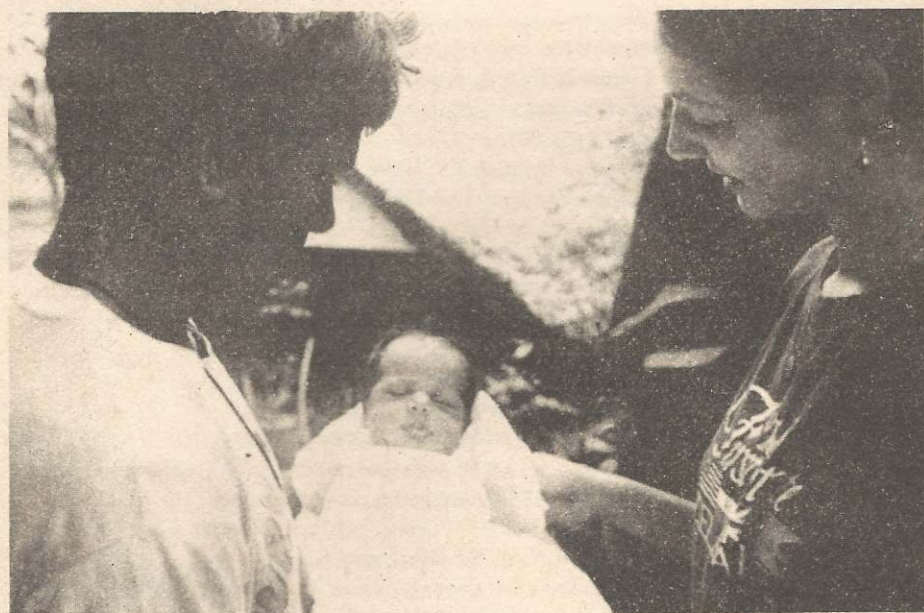


to see what it was like in Auroville and if it seems the right thing to do with my life.

"Here I can pursue things that interest me, like voluntary work in

the Health Centre or with Village Action; and I can get individual attention and special classes in the school that I could not get in my American school.

"I like people. And I like being able to sit down in Aspiration Kitchen and talk to people from all over the world about everything. As for the material conditions – the first week I didn't have a mosquito net...so you can imagine! But now I'm adjusting. It's good to get used to living in a simple life-style."



The first second-generation Aurovillian. Aurora and Selvaraj with daughter Urvsie.

AUROVILLE TODAY

By Airmail
Bookpost

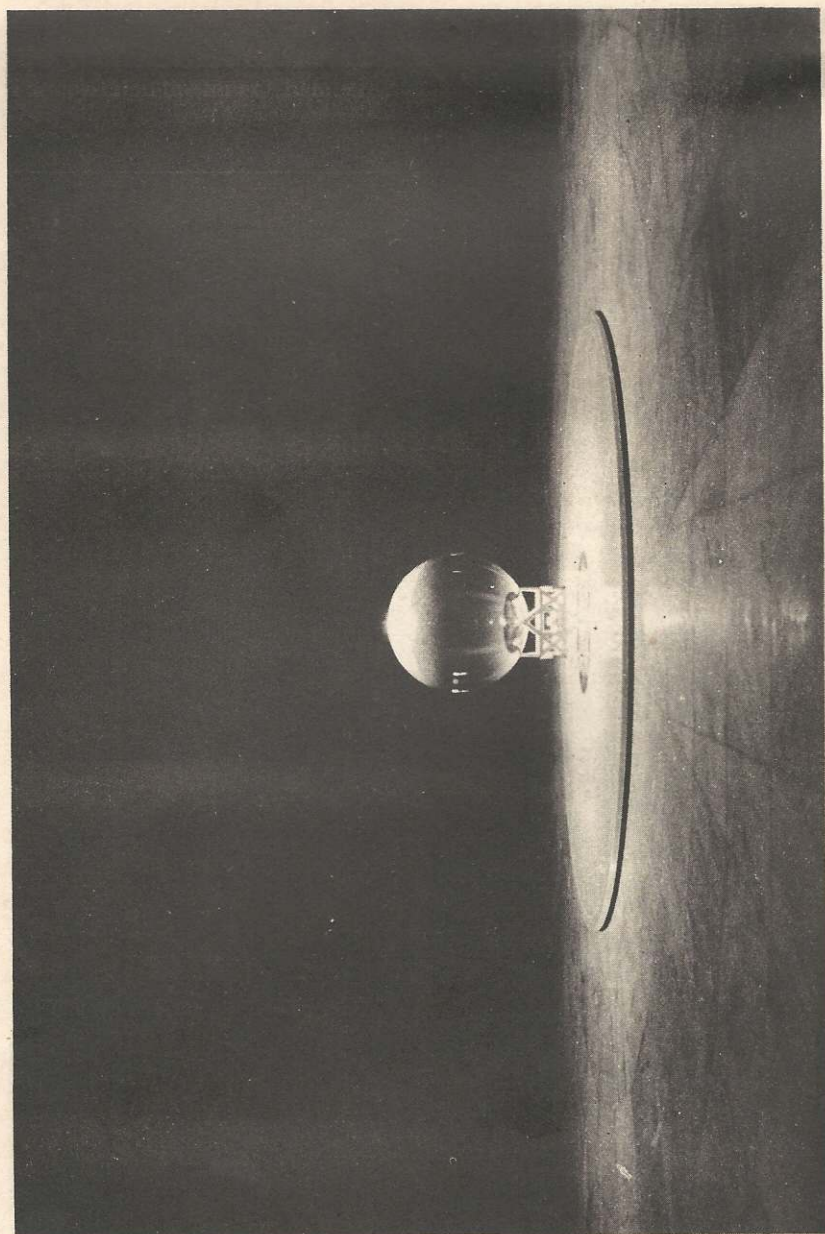
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In this issue: Opening the Chamber, Travellers' return ...



The crystal in the Inner Chamber

Photo John Mandeon

Re-entry

Afficionados of space travel will recall the drama of re-entry; those few minutes when the spacecraft, plunging back into the earth's atmosphere, is severed from its umbilical link with Mission Control, and those NASA magicians, after piloting a half-ton lump of high technology faultlessly through interstellar vastnesses, are reduced to gnawing their finger nails and playing nervously with plastic cups.

Well, it's an image that haunts me at the moment. Because after returning recently to Auroville from the West, I feel rather like those astronauts who, in transition between two worlds, just have to sit it out and see where - or if! - they will finally touch down. It's tempting to ascribe this dangling condition to culture shock. And it's true. Nothing ever prepares me for the accelerating thrust that propels me, in one short taxi ride, from a world of bullock carts to the rarified atmosphere of jet travel, or the equally fierce decelerating jerk that, on my return, jolts me out of my Boeing cocoon into the steamy soup of Madras. But it's more, much more than this. For the last three months have been a series of shocks and challenges which, ultimately, have confronted me with various aspects of myself - some of which have been less than entertaining.

It's insidious, that embrace of the West. As doors slipped quietly open, as buses arrived on time, as another perfect Capuccino coffee materialized with a crisp biscuit poised beside it on the saucer, a certain question began elbowing its way through my head. "What the hell am I doing living in India?" And as I walked familiar streets, savouring the freedom of anonymity, the release from staring eyes and probing hands, and as I met old friends doing good work and seamlessly meshed into professions, into that self-confident world of credit cards, fax and microwaves - a world I perceived as increasingly closed to me as I stood, shifting uneasily from foot to foot, a bumpkin at the gates - another more urgent doubt arose. "Did I

make a wrong decision all those years ago? Is Auroville a mirage, the real work here? Have I wasted my life?"

My return brought scant relief. Auroville was green, yes, beautiful, yes. But so many tired faces, so many loose ends and strung-out enterprises, so much small-town gossip, so many petty arguments. And the stall is dark and ill-stocked, the greenbelt roads as bad as ever, the tap in the bathroom is still dripping, someone is felling the palmyra forest, a thief had broken into our house . . . Aaaaaaaaah!

Re-entry! Eventually, of course, the nightmare ends. The spacecraft stops pitching and juddering, the parachutes crack open, and suddenly all is quietness and light as the frail craft swings silently, like a great silver bird, through the limpid air. It began with me one afternoon. I don't know how or why. But suddenly

I saw the problem is not Auroville's - although, objectively, there is much to rectify here. Nor is it the superficial allure of the West. The real problem is that, over the past year, I lost my connection with the spirit of this place, with the point of power that shapes the daily flotsam and jetsam into something dynamic and meaningful. I'd become thinned out, dessicated, de-juiced, as daily concerns invaded all the crevices of my being, leaving me no space for play or contemplation. And now the old ways back to the source are blocked, too well-trodden, stale. I need, I realize, a new way in, a new language, a flame to sear me and break me open, bare me, to the sharp winds, the pains and joys of this City of Dawn. I need once more to say "Yes".

So I swing quietly beneath my parachute, straining through cumulus for my first glimpse of these new roads, this new land. It's a long and somewhat tedious business. But once, momentarily, the clouds parted and there, far off, was something like a promise, an affirmation, a call. It was sunlight. Sunlight piercing a crystal of the Absolute. . .

Alan

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

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♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

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- AVI Deutschland, Bismarckstrasse 121, 4900 Herford, Germany.
- AVI España, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain.
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