

Auroville Today

JUNE-JULY 2002, No. 161-162

Literary Issue

■ Poetry: : Alan, Anandi, Aryan, Bindu, Ela, Lucas, Jivatma, Lloyd, Loretta, Martanda,

Mauna, Pavitra, Riah, Sankaran, Shraddhavan, Shwetaketu, Vijay, Vika

■ Prose: Alan, Anu, Jivatman, Muniandi, Raymond, Roger, Varenya, Yanne

More poetry and prose on the
AV-Website
<http://www.auroville.org>

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South Indian summer: 42C in the shade, power cuts, clogged nights broken only by the sound of the brain-fever bird. A time, in other words, when imagination, the ability to abstract oneself from outer circumstances, is at a premium.

So we thought this would be a good opportunity to tap into the imaginations of Aurovilians by asking them to send us examples of anything they have written of an imaginative nature. The response was surprisingly good, revealing that a number of Aurovilians enjoy writing either as a diversion, a means of self-exploration, or as a way of refining their thoughts. For, as Francis Bacon put it, "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man".

In this special double issue of Auroville Today we publish a selection of what we received. Enjoy!

Clearing

Ageing may - I guess -
wrap this endlessness
of isolation in
one day to remember
as of long ago

Without big changes
- the stray cat will still
keep house on the doormat
and the same hand will light
a candle - to write

Evening will still draw
the eye-lid of the night
over colours in leaves
and crickets being shrill
frantic as new stars

Still - mind altering
meaning at stages -
the moon may cease to be
the friend it hardly was
three nights in a row

A voice will then ask:
'What falseness was that?'

Lloyd

Utter Blackness

In utter blackness
Shrill-voiced bats
Flap leathern wings;
A sharp-toothed wind
Tortures rickety trees.

Scree clatters down to where
The river grinds the boulders of its bed
Like angry teeth.

This tyrant dark
Grants us no star to see by;
Not one bright pebble gleams.

Blinded we hear
Bat-flap and squeak,
Boughs' groan and creak;
Unvisioned suffer
The rush and moan of wind and water,
Their icy clasp.

What resplendent delicacy of dawn
Is this night-womb nurturing?

Shraddhavan

The Evening dress

Many-layered skirts
Of pale silvery silk,
Swinging intricate pleats and folds
That flare out satin-smooth again,
Under a web of most delicate lace
Gathered here and there
To rich foaming ruffles, fine rippling frills,
A sprinkle of sequins,
A hazy veil of twilight-golden gauze:

Ocean, the ever-young enchantress, yet again
Puts on fresh evening finery to assail
The stony self-absorption
Of these unresponsive rocks.

Shraddhavan

Shraddhavan is in charge of the "Savitri Bhavan". Several of her poems, stories, essays and book reviews have been published in the Ashram journal Mother India as well as in the Heritage magazine.

Lloyd's literary interests started in The Netherlands. In Auroville he published the poetry collection "But for the Breeze" and wrote an unpublished introduction to the Book of Changes, called 'China and I Ching'.

Fire

When God loses himself in a deep night
and a fire devours the earth.
Fire without flame. Word without words!
We go, don't we?
We go with an obstinate certainty.
When God walks alone on the path
and the path resounds with His astonishing steps.
When the Hour of the glorious march?
When the arrested time and our voices released?
When there is no more way by day and by night,
when there is nothing but a blind
and naked chasm that remains.
Certainty or death.
How many those who dare the void?
With this acuity of the senses, beyond the limit of words!
Words that cannot speak.
Could they ever?
One has to discover a sound!
But where is our thirst for adventure?
To whom this high forehead and these eyes?
Is it coming, the time of the just and living souls?
Do we still have to walk?
Do we still have to pray?

And the flames were rising with the morning sun.
With the light of the North.
With the silence of God.
And where is Earth?
And where is Man?
The earth trembles beneath my feet, but where is Man?
Those who search, those who are still trying.
For the others, the silence!
For the others the silence!
When God lost himself in a deep night and the rising sun
would not bring a morning,
I left the flames and the men.

Pavitra

Pavitra's first vocation was to be a painter, but he also became a self-taught cellist. At the age of 17, he discovered the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and, seven years later, in 1984, he settled in Auroville where he published 'Tara', a poem collection.

Invisible

I wonder about invisibility:
those islanders
unable to see the unknown ships —
salt-hardened —
darkening their lagoon.

And what about Michael,
womb-wet,
swimming through the meshes?

Alan

Alan is a greenbelter turned editor turned scribbler of marginalia.

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Silence

Silence is eternal. It is never disrupted or broken, simply over-layed. Through any interruption Silence may be found if one were only to listen beyond the power of their mortal hearing and focus on what is beyond the current illusion. Silence is not the absence of sound but rather a sound unlike any other; one which cannot be described by any word or expression, only defined within one's own understanding.

Out Walking

A gentle breeze caressing the grass,
Fireworks decorating the night,
The moon lighting for us the land
The silence breaking all sounds.
Fire in the distance painted the sky
Trees in the distance shaped like umbrellas

Mosquitoes all over, of course...
One would really think we were in Africa.

A plenty of giraffes missing.
Elephants bulging in the horizon missing.
The roaring lion missing.
A moment to capture,
Our short walk to Kalaveli tank.

Martanda

As Martanda puts it: Born and brought up playing with pebbles and amongst the trees in Auroville — the map is in our hands!

Monica

Look
I am only this much woman.

Bleeding red-black silver
onto your day's existence
Silently plaiting
husband-father children children
into the dark length of my hair.

My dreams
I buried
in the farthest corner of the room.

Nights such as these
are yet mine:

I fiercely whisper
leaning close to the wind,

Whatever still
throbs in my fading life
whatever flushes
for the waiting moon.

I scatter poems
through the broken air.

Bindu

Joining Auroville Today 8 years ago, Bindu hasn't written any poetry since. This is from an old, almost-forgotten collection.

Nature

Nature is like an unending dream,
One as bright as a sunlight beam
A magical world, so various and vast,
A bit of the future, present and past
When anger and frustration burn,
To nature's peace one can always turn
Soon one feels at ease again,
Inspired by this dearest friend.

Aryan

Riah (17), Aryan (19), Jivatma (17) and Vika (17) study for their O-levels at the Centre for Further Learning. Poetry is part of their English literature classes.

Matrimandir

The gold-ringed gesture
flung across a million lazy noons

is anchored by a banyan
dreaming no other coast...

Alan

Inner Sky

My sky is the sky of the flatlands
A massive dome of soaring infinity.
Canvas for naked forces writ large and loud

My sky is my visible mantra.
A vast wilderness of possibilities
Witnessed in fluid eddies of illumination.
Let me have courage to rise, free and
Unbounded, into the immensity of my
sky.
And fly, high and true.

Priya Vincent

Priya is a farmer and author of the book 'How my Garden Grew' from which these poems are taken.

Tiruvannamalai

With each step I touched loftier heights
Each step further dimmed the lights
Now mere blossoms in a far off field
Thousand mirrored moons revealed
I was the loner from a sleeping flock
The town that slept by this hillock.

The moon was now on every stone
Rocks and treetops in Amber shone
As though even they perceived
In me a friend who believed
In purity of their crystal thoughts
In uprightness of their crooked stalks.

The hillock paths untrampled lay
Untouched by the worldly fray
World that so close at foothills rolled

As Sankaran puts it: I am a Hindi speaking, 'English' thinking, Tamil Aurovilian Indian gazing expectantly into the future with a view to find himself.

There must be something

There must be something
Inside of me which already knows
But wandering amidst the waves of humanity
I do not reach perfection
And though I look hard for equality
I do not find harmony in creation.
But what, then, is life?
An endless voyage?
Or is there an aim to it?
Are we striving in vain?
Is everything really meant to be so profane
If so,
What then are the stars and the waves?
Are they only reflections of our illusions?

Jivatma

Game Over

My life is a knife
That cuts so deep
Into the flesh of strife

My memories are bitter sweet
In the bones of my mind that can taste the heat.
My friends are people that I know
But do not know me that well
Perhaps it's the shell
That surrounds my hell

Could this be a paradise?
I feel a chill
When I stand on this hill
Looking down into the waters of deep blue
Thinking to myself that there are so few
Good men that lived until the age of thirty
It is my heart that is thirsty
I can feel the voices beneath the blue waters calling
It is me that stands on this edge
I made no pledge
To live my life
I did not share this thought with others

People and children without fathers and mothers
It is life that is so hard.
Hereby I lay down my last card.

Vika

World, by age just as old
Yet this piece of sod had aspired
This the Hillock, self-sired.

An ethereal breeze wafted celestial smells
Of untrodden snows, deep sea shells
These paths that have often lent
To my soul everlasting contentment
Each atom of this Hillock meant
To me, His tranquil embodiment.

Here oft buds and blooms in silent tones
His glory soothingly intone
Mortal world step by step is lost
The immortal guest leads mortal host
Through portals of inward bliss
Where guest and host their journey cease.

Sankaran

Borderland

A dreamland this
still glistening after many years
and inhospitably covered
by a patina in which
occult intermingles with contradictions
to expose extreme designs

The air drunken with movement
an odour of jasmine and decay
the earth of a brighter red than elsewhere
in this country
even the winds breathe
legends
whose heroes
transmit the essence of centuries
through the huts of the villages

In the daytime the world
merges into a faint glimmer
unclear where the human ends
and the God begins
who stands beneath the palm tree
and looks towards us

Away from the big streets
at the edge of the farthest rice field
his consort unveils
her magnificent splendour
her hair floating like air roots
above the lotus pond
which a elephant-headed son
guards with ease

I saw her moments before
in the piercing vibration
of sunburnt plains
a mother adorned with skulls
who devours her children at midday
and gives birth again in the evening

In the borderland I clearly sense her
during the journey
the head rests on the black breast
on burning grounds
she collected the milk
for her delicious play

That weaves me
still after many years
into the mood of the divine hour
in which the light
reconciles itself with the earth
and the hooves of the cattle
create a veil of dust
between the eye and the distance

Contact emerges
in the mist of nourishment and smoke
in the softer shades
of dusk
the familiar holds the gaze and
the woman with the many faces
patiently lightens the first wick

Translated by Heidi

Ela is a science teacher, as well as a travel guide who conducts seminars on Indian culture and philosophy of yoga. Writing poetry is a pastime for her.

Grenzland

Ein Traumland ist dieses
auch nach Jahren noch gleißend
und unwirtlich überzogen
von einer Patina in der sich
Okkultes mit Widersprüchen
zu extremen Mustern verwischt

Die Luft getränkt mit Bewegung
im Geruch von Jasmin und Zerfall
ist die Erde röter als anderswo
in diesem Land
atmen selbst die Winde
Legenden aus
deren Helden
die Essenz der Jahrhunderte
durch die Hütten der Dörfer tragen

Tagsüber gehen die Dinge
flimmernd ineinander über
unklar wo das Menschliche aufhört
und der Gott beginnt
der unter der Palme steht
und zu uns hersieht

Abseits der großen Straßen
am Rande des letzten Reisfelds
enthüllt sich seine Gefährtin
in ihrer üppigen Pracht
ihre Haare treiben wie Luftwurzeln
über dem Lotosteich
den ein elefantenköpfiger Sohn
gelassen bewacht

Ich sah sie Momente zuvor
in der beißenden Schwingung
sonnenverkarsteter Ebenen
eine schädelbehangene Mutter
die ihre Kinder am Mittag frisst
und am Abend erneut gebiert

Im Grenzland spür ich sie deutlich
während der Fahrt
ruht der Kopf an der schwarzen Brust
auf Verbrennungsplätzen
hat sie die Milch geschöpft
für ihr köstliches Spiel

Das mich einflieht
auch nach Jahren noch
in die Stimmung der heiligen Stunde
in der sich das Licht wieder
mit dem Boden versöhnt
und die Hufe der Rinder
den Staubschleier
zwischen Auge und Ferne legen

Berührung keimt auf
im Dunst von Nahrung und Rauch
in den milderen Farben
der Dämmerung
hält das Vertraute den Blick und
die Frau mit den vielen Gesichtern
entzündet geduldig den ersten Docht

Ela

Loretta lived in Auroville in the early years and was so inspired by the atmosphere of those times that she began writing poems. Recently she returned to live once again in the community.

Have you seen the giants walking

Have you seen the giants walking
On the wide red land?
Seen them moving large and grand
Against the sky?
I have seen them coming,
Tiny seedlings in their hands.
Hands and feet as red
As the earth they work each day.
Carrying the future
On their backs and in their dreams.
Seen them growing tall and strong
As they hammer out their way
In a land of yielding beauty
Making progress from delay.
Seen them growing wise and deep
As they dig the hardened clay,
Worry water from the dry red earth,
Bend their backs,
Sweat out their sorrows,
Wrest from yesterday
Tomorrow's coming
Of a new world's birth.

Have you seen the giants working
In the quiet, secret spaces?
In the kitchens, in the gardens;
The world's forgotten places?
I have seen them rise, emerging
Out of ignorance and pain.
Faith sustained, they work and labour
To create a new domain.
A thousand tiny troubles
Tell the story of their struggle
As they strive to bring alive
A long forsaken dream.
In their hearts an angel singing
Being's beauty widely winging
As they grow to know the truth
Of creation's will to be
A living harmony.
Have you seen their victory?

Have you seen the giants building
High atop construction beams,
Suffering the toils
Of their hardest dreams?
I have seen them growing, changing,
Working, working out the problems
Of a vast and varied nature
Through necessity and failure,
With enduring dedication
Consecrated to completion.
Seen them struggle with the passing
And the grasping ways of time;
Hoping deep enough to open,
Feeling love enough to trust,
Finding courage to create
A living wonder with their labour.
From the nameless, from the formless
You can see the promise rising
In the clearer, higher spaces
At the centre of the city,
Breathless peace, transcendent beauty.
While the glorious expansion
Of the limitless in man
Opens wide the striving hearts
To manifest the miracle
Decreed by destiny.

Loretta

The fitness trail

A fitness trail with obstacles. The motorway is not far off, but here nature valiantly persists: it puts out purple asters with yellow hearts, fennel blossoms daintily, pines and ilexes bear fruit; you even come across shy olive trees wandering around on the spot.

A few open-air enthusiasts used to gather there regularly, without looking for each other or mingling. They would arrive beneath uncertain skies, during cold snaps, between two of those enshrouding drizzles that recall the torrent of mediocrity this world bows beneath as if it were a law of nature. They survived doubtful atmospheres, the joyous barking of families picnicking on Sundays between two hurdles, the bow-wows and mastiffs that the idiotic and malicious would hilariously unleash amongst their running feet. Occasionally they would leap over a couple as if that was just another obstacle. Hours of dusk, sacrosanct greyness, grey soot to wallow in, the motorised desert, the regimented bipeds who do not waste their time, those who camp on the slab of boredom, those who lick the boredom sweating from their walls, those who tirelessly re-plaster the smooth boredom of their ceilings, sitting in a cage, moving in a cage, going round their fitness trail without even depositing in the cloakroom the cage around their head ... All those beings for whom Leopardi seems to have written these words:

"Boredom changed our diapers: he stands unmoving beside our cradle, and the nothingness above our tomb."

Poor Leopardi – what company to find yourself in! Our unacquainted companions survived all this and held on their way across the tiny steppes of every day. They too, to start with, had been trapped between two boards; but their assiduous running beneath this lowering sky, their readiness to drink in its streamings of sunshine, gradually loosened the jaws of the vice. They accepted spinneys littered with toilet paper, strewn with shapeless bags and dead cartridges. And gradually the track was extended – they discovered paths that skirted the village and slipped towards other byways, they annexed patches of scrub. It was enough for one to try out a new way – then others would dare to follow him. They flushed out flowering shrubs, unexpected fords between pebbles, dilapidated cottages awaiting a second soul.

Sometimes they might glimpse, at nightfall, an improbable horse grazing (some cart-horse escaped from the butcher): this solitary relic was enough to cancel out the grey, artificial sky, stretched there like

a circus tent, the poles and pylons, the quarries and cables, the disembowelled hills, all the obsessive reminders, the signals that an ordinary man, intent on remaining so, surrounds himself with for reassurance, so as to be able to say: "You see – the world is like me, we are just the same ..."

Once, and only once, Maxime had company. He found himself jogging alongside an adolescent, an insignificant girl, but one who tasted the air as he did, and like him leapt over rubble, a stranger to filth – a girl who quite clearly had never had any dealings with the grey conspiracy. Lacking any face of her own, she seemed to be no more than a way of breathing. He looked closely at her as she was trying to catch her second wind on the slope – yes, he looked at her, just because she was so unremarkable, and he met her eyes: they were grey, but a different grey – not the one that is choking us, but one where, unavowed, a childlike dawn was about to break. He felt a strange certainty that these eyes like a hesitant sky were capable of turning to space-blue, especially because in them danced little gold dots that betrayed an intrusion of sun. Good gracious, a whole world – the

eyes of an adolescent with very ordinary hair, face and figure ... That day Maxime's stubborn trot was enriched by a different sort of oxygen. But that dim young girl seemed to dim everything around her – perhaps, in fact, so that only her eyes should live. What unforeseen programmes might be resting within those youthful pupils? As he spurred ahead, certain that she had not even seen him – which didn't matter at all – a strange formula came into his mind: "That is a being whose heart breathes through its eyes."

As the track was extended, when we began to run alongside vines, leap over ditches, our gaze clearing tiny wild gardens, contact was established with the peasants – at first they disliked these incursions across their territory, but later, aided by habit, they started to enjoy them. There had been gibes: for quite a time, one fellow used to wait for the arrival of Maxime the Stubborn, to keep pace with him, mimicking him grotesquely; later he would watch him passing without a word; and then one day threw him a bunch of grapes. The joggers, by their regularity, gradually day by day took possession of those places, and without giving it a thought, added to the passages in a world that is in fact riddled with holes and galleries, and wants only to communicate in all directions, regardless of individual aloofness. Friendship creates obligations: it became necessary to stop for a chat, or to taste a mouthful of home-made wine. Once some of the vine-growers expressed a sort of malevolent admiration of these joggers who owed nothing to the soil, strange permutations

ensued. One farmer made a bet that he would run, if they would hoe his vines. And soon the rustic clodhoppers were to be seen jogging and leaping hurdles, while the light-footed fellows, finally integrated into the surroundings, were trimming and pruning. On one side, the most rheumatic grew more supple and straight; while the others learned a new kind of endurance, of sweat. Calloused hands gripped gymnastic rings, while white ones grew initiated to the soil. A wind of youthfulness was blowing. The sky showed a tendency to open up more willingly. One morning the litter and cartridges disappeared from the groves. The vine-growers noticed the existence of flowers, and harkened to their silent beauty – so long as we took care of their vine-stocks or their tractor, they could savour the delights of irresponsibility. Hunters, by common consent, stopped frequenting this land that had become disquieting. Socio-professional, medical, and family obsessions started prudently retreating.

None of this had been planned or organised. By some sort of grace, from day to day everything was done. At no time was any community of glass or concrete announced, but when the idea came up to renovate one of those crumbling cottages that here and there in the locality were despairing of ever finding a taker, so that some jogger-farmer could commune with the sunset, everyone, or almost, joined in, and materials flowed. In a few days the thing was accomplished. Serious-mindedness steadily dwindled, and with it health-problems and questions of subsistence. Soon the cramps of responsibility were no more than a memory.

And in front of the greyest, the most time-worn of these miniature farmsteads, bereft for years of its paddock, well and outhouses, perched on the most banal of boulders, Maxime was one day surprised to find seated beside him that young girl distinguished only by her insignificance – and of course the look in her eyes, set a little too far apart, and now grey-blue. Since it was drizzling, she had thrown a shabby gabardine over her tracksuit: it was far too wide in the shoulders and reached to her ankles. Not far away the motorway was emitting its murderous purr. The air seemed stagnant. Everywhere in the grey world a silent exasperation brooded. Waves of stink flowed from the Civilisation of Desire. When, O when the Great Desire? But there were the two of them, sitting quietly. They had had the same thought. This homestead was waiting for them, for them and no-one else, for them, as they caressed it with their eyes. On the other side of the motorway, some wide pools winked: they would shut their ears and catch those unceasing optical signals of friendship ... He did not take her hand. They stood parallel, and their hands met. In the end he turned his head and courageously looked down at that face shaped like a slender buoy, where two unclouded guiding lights vied with each other in widening – and gently, without forcing the pace, like a free caravelle whose wildness nothing will ever be able to tame, he navigated towards those two lights, which were shining for their own sake with no idea of luring anything. Then he felt her totally present, like a little cabinet that does not close and has no hidden drawer.

Raymond Thépot

Raymond Thépot is a poet, translator and short story writer who has been living in Auroville for many years. He has translated Sri Aurobindu's epic poems *Savitri* and *Ilion* into French. This story is from a forthcoming collection *Real Utopias*. Translated from the French by Shraddhavan

Haiku

silencio. Buenos Aires
cada mañana
y antes del pájaro .

Y el lenguaje
se desmorona en verde
mañana inmóvil.

Anandi

True Love

O love what hours were thine and mine,
In the buds of May light spring divine,
Our hearts rejoiced in more faith than words can say,
Our love was more fair than the beauty of day.
On our brow a grace had consented to leave
A delight so pure we forget heaven's needs;
Such a tender voice never did sing to me
Of all the sweetness possessed in a human show of glory,
That would minister infinity forever etched in my memory.

Shwetaketu

Shweta, a young adult, came to Auroville in 1996 and has since developed into an amateur poet and astrologer who has gone from idealist to skeptic to escapist and is hoping the next ten years will bring something more rewarding...

Dancing in Byzantium Rereading Blake in Aurodam

"Il me semble que je suis en train d'apprendre beaucoup de choses, justement sur cette transition qu'on appelle la mort. Ça commence de devenir de plus en plus irréal... C'est très intéressant."

Mother's Agenda III, 16.10.62

December, a quiet morning, it has just stopped raining, outside a lush greenness, the sound of birds, and far away the rain-enraged roar of the ocean. Almost empty muddy roads, the sound of "ammas" cycling by, cheerful laughter can be heard from the road, the full throated kettle-drum sound of the brain fever bird comes from the garden nearby.

Travelling in Kerala I felt you close. It would come on me suddenly – I could sense you sitting across tables, or present in the corner of rooms.

Walking through the forest of Thekkadi, or on the long bus ride down to Quilon I was alone with my thoughts and frequently with you. Our minds are like receiving stations; one has to know how to adjust channels when one ruts into routine. There are frequencies difficult to catch like colours beyond or behind the visible spectrum and which come to us through the static.

I hear you, whole conversations in my head, I can even make out the intonation of your voice. Your voice a whisper, clear as light in the clamour of the storm. It comes and goes suddenly out of the nowhere. I'll think of you and a conversation will ensue. At times, I feel I'm picking up on your presence, at others just raiding the jumbled storeroom of my mind, the grab-bag of my past. Much recedes unrecorded by the surface mind but registers subconsciously and can be retrieved when the barriers of the mind break down. Memory does not register time, but intensity. Is memory independent of the mind? Haphazard, unsequential, the penumbra of life's unlit interiors illumined by a sudden flash, an intrusion of grief or insight. The surface mind registers but more often than not deforms what the intuition receives. And how real is memory? Vistas of splendour haunt us like the partial translation of a half forgotten text, the code to which we lack...

The distance created by your death at first saddened and surprised me – I didn't expect it, or want to believe it would exist – but I now feel I have come to know you better, acquired a deeper feeling for the different sides and shades of your personality, the human complexities of your conflict and struggle. Taken by the beauty of your aspiration, transfixed by that ethereal flame, the shadows went unnoticed and were refused. We are all pursued by our shadow, our dark familiar angel, anchored in the dusk, partner in the dance that called us down to earth. Born under the sign of Saturn you were fascinated by the dark side of life, the shadows of another sun. You created situations that were the opposite of what you sought, through the very roles you chose. "Je me suis fait l'ointaine, intouchable" – you remarked, as you called all the while for affection and intimacy. But you would show us you would be loved. You played with drama and tragedy drawing others into it dancing your final act out bravely and alone in a last dark tango of body and soul. Was it necessary? Perhaps.

But now, can you care about our contradictions now in a world that moves to other laws? Be true to one's fragments, I would have said a few months ago. And so I write unweaving time with words. Windows blow open, a telephone doesn't ring, the past whispers of presences, absences, your urn and ashes in the hall, as velvet sanctuaries of dream haunt an asphalt world.

Roger Harris is a founding member of Auroville Today. This story is from his unpublished novella 'Dancing in Byzantium'.

Roger

To see the world in a grain of sand...

That's euphemism when you've been told repeatedly in the AV News about the microbes in the bio-region, the teeming bacteria, potential parasites...

You transform from a Blake junkie to a hypochondriac and buy a new doormat. One grain too many brings in the dust. Such is the mundane manipulation of mystery.

On the cellular level, there is oneness of course. But there are limits. Take frogs. There's always that moment of weakness. Shall I kiss it? Just then it glubbers and blinks, and thankfully you are able to change your mind in time and swat it off your toothbrush. The oneness of man and nature is a myth.

And yet, the heaven in a wild flower...

Wild jasmines in April, pucker out from every corner, and whether you want to or not, you

find yourself singing. Thus unknown to you, you indulge in an environmentally sustainable deed. Provided you sing in tune. Sigh. All life is yoga.

Next line: *Hold infinity in the palm of your hand.*

Exaggeration! Did Blake ever stop to consider ants? They arrive in infinite numbers ahead of the thunder clouds, darkening the wall in a single infinitesimal moment. Try holding even one.

And eternity in an hour.

That's easy. Indian Stretchable Hour, stretches and stretches beyond imagination here...

For God is Great

Still.

Anu is the author of the poetry collections *Mobile Hour* and *Light Matter* and of the book *Parallel Journeys*. A new book is in preparation.

Anu

An afternoon in Hermitage

The experience conveyed here is nothing new, but it has helped me through difficult situations and it is my wish that it may work also for you.

Once I was living on a deserted piece of land in Southern India. My life during the two years and three months I spent there was that of a pioneer of sorts, in the sense that when I arrived, the land was totally bare of even the frailest blade of grass. No tree had survived the onslaught of grazing cattle from the nearby villages, apart from a few dwarf palmyra trees and a baobab. For one who loves challenges and solitude, prayer and communion with nature (yes, even stones are natural, and so is a bare earth baked under a scorching sun), it would have been hard to find a

more ideal setting. But at times, when faith in God and one's good fortune gives way to self-pity and the sadness of being alone, when one feels weak against the violent assaults of an inner turmoil, even the most exciting life can take on the guise of a nightmare.

One day, I was pumping water from a shallow well I had dug for the burgeoning dream of "my" bird sanctuary. This particular day had been a hard one right from the moment of setting foot on the ground. Everything had gone wrong that could possibly go wrong: the house was surrounded by cows when I woke up, my dog had disappeared, all matchboxes were damp and I couldn't start the fire, villagers had broken the fence, workers did not show up and someone had stolen my watch. A mess of a day like one has to face, sometimes, when stars suddenly think it wise to meddle with human affairs. And there I was, pumping

water at the hand-pump. And I remember, though it was early afternoon, the sky suddenly became very dark. Dark grey clouds appeared at great speed and it became almost night right in the middle of noon. An awesome feeling came over me like at the end of a world, and the whole scene is engraved in my memory, as vivid as if it had happened yesterday. How lonely, and lost, and powerless I felt, at that moment. I may have cried, one hand on the long green handle of the pump, and life flashed through my mind as it may do when death arrives.

But suddenly, while the first heavy drops of rain started to fall and the sky struck the land and the four corners of heaven with its wrathful lightning, some funny thought arose in me. I felt projected twenty years ahead of that particular moment, and looking back. And what did I remember from these extraordinary circumstances? What remained of the fear and anguish that had tied knots into my stomach? Only beauty. The incredible beauty of the scenery, the sweetness of little timid flowers growing around a small hut covered with palmyra leaves, budding creepers, a water jar filled with fresh, clear water, and birds, lizards, frogs, harmony, and the joy of being alive. Knowing that these would be my memories, I became aware of them being present and enjoyed this downpour of loving rain over the open-armed and welcoming Mother earth.

This happened thirteen years ago. And to this day I remember. There will be a time when today's insurmountable difficulties will have left behind them a taste of sweetness and harmony, when years will have softened the hard and sharp edges of life and through the veil of an apparent drama, a smile will shine, a smile that was always there.

Varenya spent 12 years in Auroville and has just recently returned after 10 years away. She is at present involved in maintaining the Auroville website.

Varenya

She who listens to the voices of the world

Simon sleeps. His chest rises and falls steadily, his breath at last calm. The fever has gone down, as predicted by Doctor Shankar Subramanian. The minute I had introduced myself to him, I realised that something serious had occurred. Shankar Subramanian immediately brought me to this hotel where Simon had felt unwell. He had not hidden his concern to me as regards Simon's extreme state of weakness. I cancelled my trip to Trivandrum.

I sat on the ground, my back against his bed, a parchment pad of writing paper on my knees.

It is imperative that I forget nothing, that I not trick myself, and fulfil the need to write the truth in all its obscenity. My brain boils over with images, people, words. Too many new sensations have confused my spirit. I need to get back to what is essential. I need to organise my intimate mess. I need to create approximate facts and unveil lies to render the absolute truth. I need to listen to my inner voice, tell this story, translate, refine my thought, but also and above all, bring my whole being to unveil itself without judgement or reticence. The most difficult thing is just getting started. The beginning is never what one might have thought it to be, it has to be preceded by a devastating emotion. How far back must I go to find the source of what is now in the process of radically changing my life?

The best would be to tame my memory so that no interpretation gets in the way of the sequence of events, I must describe more than feel and react, conduct my introspection stealthily, but without pushing the spirit behind closed doors. Never before having felt the need to explore the very depths of this story have I felt the need to write.

First I must not forget that I began this journey on someone else's behalf. This journey which was supposed to have been a parenthesis, a holiday of sorts, has transformed itself into a trial, an ordeal, a journey into my inner labyrinths. I observe first hand the predictable slipping of one personality and life into another.

How long has it been since I last spoke French? With Simon in Nallapuram we communicated in English during our working hours. Those rare moments we found ourselves alone we spoke a bastardised French enriched with English and Tamil words. The last person who I really spoke to in my own tongue was Jacques.

I was not aware of the pain born of this situation. I now realise in passing that my language has eroded. Foreign words have come to haunt my dreams, and images are no longer born of full-fledged sentences. My thought has narrowed itself down a prisoner of primal statements born of the paucity of my English and the impossibility to communicate with locals anything more than the vital basics. Is it this suffering that impels in me the need to write or the imperative necessity to leave a trace of myself? It has taken all these days and this late tropical afternoon to dare to just move my pencil. Will this answer all the questions I carry within? Strangely enough even if today I know that that there is no going back, I feel no nostalgia or regret. Sometimes I do miss, like a fugitive eclipse, the grey Rouen skies, the bustling noise of the town, the bistros and my family. But the only thing that weighs me down is the absence of silken rustle of the French tongue.

Yanne Dimay

Yanne is a founding member of Auroville Today. Presently she lives in Paris where she published the novels *Pour L'amour de Kali*, *Les montagnes bleues*, *Kali*, and *Celle qui écoutait les voix du monde* from which this piece is excerpted. The translation is by Roger Harris.

The Planet

the planet	no thinking
rolls under	no talking
my feet	
while I quietly	I am
walk thru	the walking
the street	Mauna

The mystery of Life

the mystery of life	so yes, I will live
blasted	yes, I will love
my head	
	but never the same
I cannot	as before
go back	
anymore	Mauna

Mauna is, as she puts it, is an oldtimer, originally Dutch, behind-the-screen person, OM

Another Country

Michael moves to Cornwall after suffering a nervous breakdown. He meets Ingie, an enigmatic carpenter who agrees to renovate his cottage...

Ingie hunched over a tiny calculator. Too small for his fingers.
Back in his bubble. Time to prick it.
"I climbed to that stone the other day."
"Which one?"
"The Devil's Stone... Looks like I was lucky to get back safely, what with all the stories..."
Ingie punching away at the tiny keys, jotting figures on a scrap of paper. Finally,
"What were you doing up there?"
"Just sitting... thinking."
"Listening?"
Damn him.
"Yes."
Nodding slowly.
"Good place for listening."
"You go there?"
"Sometimes."
"But listening... for what?"
"Oh, all kinds... Some people go up there to listen to the past that's... locked in the stone. But the future... that's a bit more interesting."
"Can you listen to... for the future?"
"Yes."
"But how? What does that mean?"
Pause. Ingie making calculations.
"It's what I said before. Attention. Becoming

aware... of what wants to come."
"Of... intention?"
Nods.
"But what does that mean, practically? Does it mean... does it mean always looking for the new?"
Looks up.
"Not in the adman's sense."
"But then...?"
Ingie finishes the calculation, checks it, puts the calculator back in the pocket of his green overalls.
"What do people want?"
"Want? All kinds of things. Money, power. Sex. Holidays."
"And?"
"The list is endless."
Nods.
"But perhaps all these... are one. They amount to the same thing."
"Which is?"
Silence.
"A wish, a desire for... flow."
"Flow?"
"Something which moves without... resistance. The perfect, the inevitable act, thought. Something which is always... aligned."
Carpenter.
"With what?"
"Something larger. Call it whatever you like. Some people call it God, Allah... the divine..."
"And you think this... flow... will come in the future?"
Nods.

"But how?"
"Conditions change. You read it. The truth is always moving."
Too pat.
"But how... how can you be so sure?"
Eyes closed. Silence.
"There's no... proof. Not in any scientific sense. It's reading about it and... finding it inside you.
Like... closing a loop."
Too many strands escaping me, water through my fingers. But something...
"But if you feel... if everything is going to be different... how does that change things? How does that affect you now? Practically. Do you... eat differently? Paint differently? Sleep differently? What does it mean?"
Eyes still closed. Finally,
"When I remember, yes, it changes things..."
Sketches smoke in the air.
"... There's a different quality because... the context, the meaning, has changed. The frame is suddenly... larger. Different."
"But..."
"Wood, carpentry. It's not the work. It's what... comes through the work. It's what the work... calls."
Opening his eyes. Stares at his calculations.
"But still, I have to make measurements. And get them right. Assuming, that is, you want your windows to fit."

An extract from an unpublished novel by Alan

The Little stone that Lit the sun

Once upon a time the world was all dark. There was light, but it was high, high up, kept inside a star.

In those days the earth was still being formed, and so it was constantly moving, with terrible earthquakes that shifted everything around all the time – just as if some tremendous power inside was trying to push something hidden deep down underneath out through the thick crust.

One day, a little round stone that had been rolling from side to side in the darkness for thousands of years suddenly wished to know what she was, where she was, and where she was going. And at the very moment she wished that, she bumped into another stone rolling in the opposite direction, and there was a spark.

It was a very tiny spark, but since everything was in deepest darkness it seemed like a great flash that tore the shadows with its brightness. The little stone, who had often bumped into other stones without anything special happening, was terribly scared and petrified: there were the strangest forms anyone could imagine, a whirlwind of beautiful and horrible

images that seemed to go on and on for ever... but in fact the whole thing was just a glimpse, a momentary vision, and then the world fell back into its usual darkness.

This strange event caused a great upheaval in beings and things. Many who had seen it, more or less closely, were terribly confused and didn't know what to think: was the world really different from what they had believed? Was there something like light? But others were doubtful – they were sure that light could not exist; the whole thing must have been an illusion, for the world couldn't possibly be different from what it seemed to be. Only the little round stone, quietly keeping her distance from all this discussion, knew.

But still, thousands of years passed before she felt brave enough to wish to repeat the experience. Besides, rolling here and there, she ended up falling into a deep hole that was very difficult to get out of.

But one day there was a huge earthquake, and again the little stone started rolling here and there, until she was right on the edge of a cliff. Of course she couldn't see that it was a

cliff, but she could

sense that she was very high up, and that made her feel an intense longing for the light she had experienced long ago. It made her wish to roll right off the edge. And she wished so hard that she did indeed begin to move closer and closer to the drop. Then she felt herself losing contact with the ground, and falling at a dizzying speed – down, down, down... until with a crash she hit a huge rock.

Millions of tiny sparks flew up, creating a bright flash all around the earth.

The star, far up above, saw all those tiny sparks, and moved down to meet them. They met half way, forming a wonderful bright sun that drove darkness away for ever.

Jivatman

Jivatma is a dancer from Brazil. In Auroville he is involved with education at Deepanam

Ultrasound effects

Special agent Sgt. Figo who just flew in from Toronto on a top secret investigation, on a certain sound frequency that emanates from the core of the earth, took his entire luggage and headed towards the pier, where he would take a fishing trawler 50 nautical miles due east out in the Arabian ocean.

The fishermen who took him out did not know why he was going out so far, but Sgt. Figo gave them the pretext that he was going to study the whale. I guess the fishermen fell for that as an explanation for they never brought it up again while they were on their journey. Figo took out his satellite phone and his satellite remote sensing equipment and began searching for the exact spot. "Got it!" he said out loud and yelled to the captain of the trawler that they were about 6 miles from their destination. The trawler came to a chugging idle. The air was warm and the sea was calm except for a few white caps. Figo put on his diving equipment, put his satellite stuff in a waterproof container, slipped on his oxygen tank, sat down for a few last minute check-ups, and then he told the captain that he would stay under water for about an hour and then would be back. Figo put his mouthpiece in, slid his goggles over his eyes and held his waterproof sachet with all his communication stuff. He looked at his watch; it was 9:45 am. Then he plunged into the water. Just before going under he waved to the captain.

Figo saw what he was looking for: a metallic cylindrical structure about 3 miles long and 450 meters wide, the

surface covered with coral. He saw the landing strip, and so he swam to it. He realized that there was a faint light and next to it there was a door. He proceeded to the door and knocked on the door. The sound of the knocking echoed through the water. The door opened. He went in and the door shut behind him. The water started leaving the room that he was in, and there was yet another door that was still closed. Finally the room was dry, and he felt the temperature increase and saw plumes of what he thought was air. So he took off his mask and goggles and proceeded to the next door. He opened the door and was greeted by General Ramos and his regiment.

They exchange a few pleasantries, and he was shown his room where he would take some rest so as to adjust to the artificial atmosphere that was maintained by nuclear cryogenic engines.

Figo slept through the rest of the day and night. He woke up in the morning of the 9th November; he took his shower. The water was warm and a bit salty. Figo walked into the officer's mess and had his breakfast of canned eggs and hash browns. The coffee was good but a bit salty. He thought to himself that he would have to get used to it. General Ramos broke the silence by talking about the new experiment that they were working on. He asked Figo if he would meet him in his office when he was through with his breakfast. Figo just nodded with food still in his mouth. General Ramos was a short well built man in his early forties. He was sit-

ting in his chair and sprawled on his desk were a lot of papers and min-

gled between the sheets of paper were strands of what seemed to be transparent nylon sheets.

Figo took a seat and was given a glass of campari to sip while General Ramos started explaining what role Figo was to play in his new job. Ramos went into fine detail on how humans and all species of living beings correspond to each other through ultrasound and energy fields that are so subtle that only in a special atmospheric pressurized room can one see it with the naked eye. Ramos explained that the field that they were on to now was the sound emanating machine. He said that governments pooled together to study the effects of sound waves on humans. He said that they got the idea one day when one of the top scientists was in a super market and some one bought a dog whistle. The customer was complaining to the cashier that there was no audible sound from the whistle that he had just bought. This scientist watched from a distance of about 40 yards. The cashier took the whistle and blew into it. There was no sound but people who were in close vicinity started getting agitated each time the whistle was blown. The customer who was buying the whistle got more and more agitated to the point of emotional breakdown. This is very interesting thought the scientist, and he proceeded to buy a whistle and

began to experiment with sound.

"Now that's what brings you here Figo," said the General.

"You are here because we have experimented on different continents and various races of humans." Ramos looked at Figo and there was a stillness in the air. And then Ramos broke the silence: "Listen carefully Figo,

Do you know why you have nightmares at night? Do you know why when you are alone and suddenly you feel that some one is behind you...so true is the feeling that you can feel the touch or smell the presence? Do you know why you feel angry for no apparent reason when you cannot do something that you want to do? Do you know why when you are alone and you hear your name being called and there is nobody there? Do you know why you feel restless when the moon is full. Some people call these extremes cases of people lunatics...

These are just a fraction of the results that are at our fingertips to experiment with.

Look Figo, these feelings that people believe are their own are the results of our experiment."

Extracts from a science fiction short story by Muniandi

Muniandi grew up in Auroville, has handled various jobs and is at present engaged as a web-designer.

A broken door

a broken door	wonder
a ruined dream	the ever un-sense
strange windfalls	of life
sweeping the	I'm laughing in
mind	the wind
attempting to shape	anyway
this amazing	

Mauna

The Auroville economy is not healthy

A white paper on Auroville's economy was presented in April. Its main finding is that the development of the commercial sector is a cause for concern and that Auroville's current economic structure cannot be sustained

It started during a workshop on Alternative Economic Systems in 1998. The Economy Group asked Prof. Henk Thomas, Professor Emeritus of the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands and Chairman of Stichting de Zaaier,

with Aurovilians Guy and Stuart this work started in March 1998. Stuart spent the next two years completing it, for there was a vast amount of material available: the Auroville Archives, the archives of the office of the Secretary, Auroville

Foundation, the archives of the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry, the archives of the Centre for Scientific Research and those of Aurelec contained much data. The material collected now comprises a database of over 4000 pages, together with more than 2000 balance sheets and profits and loss accounts.

Nevertheless, the data is not complete. "We rescued some files, half eaten by rats and insects, from a forgotten cupboard in the Karnataka pavilion, but we were too late to rescue files from another place that had been cleaned out just 3 weeks earlier. But we got far more than we had expected. There is probably no communitarian movement from the nineteenth century onwards which has such a rich documentation of its past," says Henk.

The researchers realized that the material collected is so extensive that scientists from many different disciplines can benefit from it. It led, in 1999, to the creation of the Auroville Social Research Centre (SRC), which now houses the database. As a spin-off from the economic research

study, the SRC initiated the Socio-Economic Survey of Auroville Employees 2000, a survey of the people who work for Auroville, as a way to learn about the specific dynamic between Auroville and the villages that surround it. [see AVToday #152, September 2001] The results of this study will be part of the Economic and Social History of Auroville 1968-2000, to be published in spring 2003, while during the coming months a Paper with the main findings is scheduled for publication.

The material found was not only vast, but also complex. Other Aurovilians with different qualifications and Manuel Thomas, a chartered accountant from Chennai, joined the research team. In March 2002, Manuel, Guy and Stuart made a presentation of the work done so far to the Auroville Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). As the final report might take at least another half year to appear, the FAMC asked them to publish a 'White Paper' about the strengths and weaknesses of the commercial sector of Auroville, together with recommendations. This White Paper was presented to the members of the Economy Group and FAMC on April 23rd, and to the executives of commercial units a day later.

Its main conclusion is that Auroville's commercial sector as a whole is far from healthy, notwithstanding the high level of profit contribution to Auroville. To evaluate the impact of these contributions on the Auroville economy, the researchers introduced the term 'carrying capacity', which indicates what the yearly contribution of all commercial units together is per capita Aurovilian. It appears that this 'carrying capacity' has gone down from

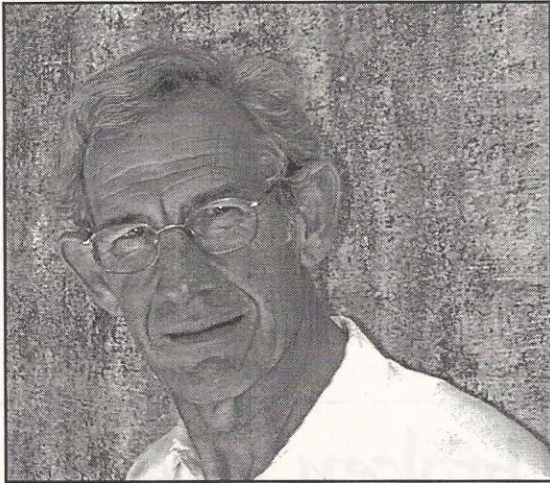
Rs 8,900/Aurovilian/year in 1993 to Rs 6,900/Aurovilian/year in 1999, taking into account inflation and the population increase. The Paper concludes that Auroville's current situation is loaded with risks and uncertainties which threaten the survival of Auroville, even in the short run.

On this basis, says the Paper, it won't do to experiment with 'no money exchange' concepts other than in a distributive sense, such as takes place in the "circle system". A new economic course has to be charted out that is both feasible, realistic as well as 'Aurovilian' in orientation and a recommendation is made to study models that have proven feasible elsewhere in the world.

The Paper also contains a number of recommendations on how to improve the commercial sector. Foremost is the need to change the prevailing negative attitude towards 'business' in Auroville. Then there is a necessity to design new structures and institutions to promote commerce; to provide access to capital; to limit product liability claims; to prevent the loss of one unit affecting the others; to enter into joint ventures; and to stimulate outsiders to participate in Auroville's development through injecting venture capital. The Paper also recommends that institutions like the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, the FAMC, and the Auroville Board of

Commerce take an active role in promoting Auroville business.

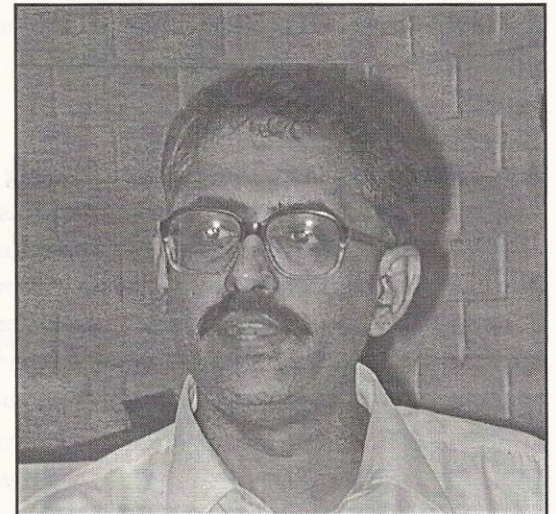
The Paper, in its final pages, expresses concern that the falling 'carrying capacity' will make it more difficult to sustain adequate maintenance levels for those who are maintained directly by Auroville. "Solidarity is a corner stone of an economy with 'Aurovilian' characteristics. Translated in the economic



Henk Thomas

if he could make recommendations for the future development of the Auroville economy. "I answered that this was absolutely impossible without a database and a solid research effort about where Auroville stands and how it got there," says Henk. "The future cannot be sketched unless one understands past trends and the current situation. And that landed me in an exercise that was more far-reaching than I imagined," he adds a bit ruefully. "For I accepted the challenge and decided to take up a study of the key issues of the economic history of Auroville from its beginning in 1968 till the present, 34 years in all."

The exercise, in its initial stages, involved data collection. Together



Manuel Thomas

sphere, solidarity implies transparency of inequalities in private property and private incomes and a legitimization of patterns that have existed in Auroville from the earlier years onwards. One could even imagine adjustments if different goals are set. Reflection on this theme is necessary. For if this basic principle of solidarity is not addressed, only those people who have sufficient income/cash flow levels will be able to stay in the Auroville of the future."

Carel

Recommendations from the White Paper

The first recommendation is a direct result of the difficulties the research team encountered in interpreting the data. They found that unit executives use the term 'contribution to Auroville' indiscriminately. It includes not only donations made to Auroville's Central Fund, but also money used to create new office or factory buildings for the unit or payments made for the maintenance of the people working in that unit. This disguises what exactly is going on in the unit. The White Paper recommends that uniform terminology be used to ensure transparency of accounts. As the researchers had no means to separate the amounts booked under 'contributions to Auroville' under more accurate headings, the figures under 'profit' and 'profit contribution' used are those that originate from the profits and loss accounts.

The second recommendation deals with the system of calculating how much of its profits a unit will share with the community. The data show that the level of profit contribution is very high; on average over the past five years 50% of profits was contributed to the community. But the units contribute on the basis of profits made in the past year. The White Paper points out that this policy is risky: for if a loss-making year follows a year of profit, a unit is obliged to contribute in the loss-making year an amount that is calculated on the profits of the previous year. But usually, a unit has not set those monies aside during the profit-making year. The unit then, in order to keep up its commitment to Auroville, starts during the loss-making year to borrow money.

If there are two consecutive loss-making years, this policy may contribute to the bankruptcy of the unit. As the figures of the last two years show a marked increase of loans while profitability has gone down, the White Paper concludes that many units are at present in serious financial difficulties.

The Paper recommends that Auroville follows the system used in tax systems around the world: at the beginning of the year a prognosis is made of a unit's profit for that year and during the year the unit contributes to the community on the bases of this prognosis. Adjustments will be made at the end of the financial year.

The third recommendation deals a blow to a typical home-grown Auroville concept: the distinction that is made between commercial and non-commercial or service units: commercial units are those that deal with 'the outside', while service units are for the direct benefit of Auroville. This distinction is arbitrary, says the White Paper, pointing out that there are many service units in Auroville that are fully commercial. The Paper recommends making distinctions using financial and economic criteria, not ideological ones, and classifying the Auroville units into 21 sectors, 13 falling in the collective/public domain and 8 in the private/commercial area.

Looking at the aggregated financial data, a rather rosy picture appears of the performance of the commercial units. Turnover steadily increases, and so do profits. But as soon as the units are studied sector-wise, the rosy picture is replaced by a rather grey one, showing the

true performance of the commercial units. The White Paper published the analysis of two of the eight commercial sectors, the handicrafts sector and the clothing and fashion sector.

The analysis of the clothing and fashion sector shows that during the last 3 years this sector has entered a major crisis, though its actual contributions have remained at high levels. The analysis of the handicraft sector without Maroma shows that 24 units together make only a few lakhs profit a year. The development of the other sectors is equally unpromising.

The rosy picture, it appears, is due to the performance of one commercial unit only: Maroma which "has become the cork on which not only the handicraft sector but even the whole of Auroville's commercial economy is floating." But if a correction for inflation is made, it appears that the turnover and profit contribution of all the commercial units together, including Maroma, has remained more or less at the same level during the last few years.

The researchers observed that commercial units are operating with different motivations. There are medium-sized units that are operating in a solid commercial manner; there are a large number of very small units that would like to expand but lack the means; and there are units where the unit holder explicitly wishes to remain at a stable/constant level rather than to expand and join the 'capitalist rat race'. Without passing any ideological judgment the White Paper advises that a clear

distinction be made between units in view of their requirements and the expectations that Auroville may have. Small enterprises, for example, will not expand unless access to loan capital for investments and working capital is available on a routine basis. They need advice with respect to accountancy, marketing and pricing policies in order to survive, aspects with which the well-established enterprises are fully familiar. In view of the low average performance of the commercial units, the White Paper recommends that special attention be given to the relatively small number of highly specialized units which have the potential to become as successful as Maroma to contribute to Auroville's future development. These units "function with world class standards of quality and have been able to secure niche markets. They require specialised attention in the areas of marketing and funding to improve their economies of scale."

Lastly, the Paper warns that, under changed conditions in the outside economic world, and with the explicit goal of expanding rapidly to a township of at least five thousand people, the current economic structure cannot be sustained. "It has been stretched to the limits, and as the record in some sectors has shown, dangerous cracks are revealed. There is even the risk with further worsening of trends that the economic weakness may jeopardize the great achievements of the past and completely erode the foundation on which the economy is based in the coming years."

"Chart out a new economic course"

An interview with Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas

AVToday: You mentioned during your presentation of the White Paper that there is insufficient motivation for Aurovilians to go into business. What are the reasons?

Manuel: There is a feeling in Auroville, as shown in our case studies, that working in a commercial unit is something not very laudable. If you are working for a service unit, then you are doing something better. Even newcomers are stimulated to work in the service sector instead of in commercial units. But this is ridiculous as much of the work a service unit is doing is identical to what a commercial unit is doing. The distinction between commercial and service units has to be reviewed and the negative attitude towards business has to change.

Henk: The motivation for entrepreneurship in Auroville is different from elsewhere. There is no personal ownership, and there is no personal profit to be made from running your unit better. As that financial dimension doesn't exist, there is a need for some other kind of reward, social prestige or appreciation by the community. But in Auroville, the contrary has happened. Till the mid-1990s, the atmosphere towards business was strongly negative. It has improved since, but by far not enough. The interviews with business executives reflect the same perception: 'there is a hostile attitude, there is no appreciation, we are just the milk-cow for the community.'

Added to that is the maintenance problem. If an executive draws say Rs 12,000/month from a unit, s/he is confronted with an increasing number of people working in service units who have to do it with only Rs 3,500. What to do and how to feel? The discrepancy is difficult to accept. Further lowering of one's own needs neither contributes much to the overall problem nor is felt to be fair. In their view the collective/public sector of Auroville lives beyond its means: there are too many service units, and the level of maintenance is mostly unacceptably low. All this poses fundamental dilemmas.

Manuel: Look at the change in the attitude of the Indian government towards business during the last 50 years. In the initial years after Independence, the attitude was that making profits was bad, that business was a necessary evil. They were taxed at 60-70%. With wealth tax included, the highest rate went up to 90%! This killed initiative. And there was a protective market, and only a few large groups thrived. After globalization, the whole thing has changed. Businessmen are rewarded and given importance, the finance ministers make a lot of noise about promoting business, especially after the IT boom started. Prime ministers and businessmen coming from abroad visit Bangalore, not Delhi. Things are changing. Businesses have to be recognized as providers of employment and economic value to the community.

So what are the ways to stimulate budding entrepreneurs?

Henk: Firstly, build up trust and change the negative attitude towards business. I don't believe that there are no entrepreneurs in Auroville. In Slovenia, 10 months after the Berlin Wall had fallen, 87,000 people had started new businesses. These were

the same people who refused to do any such thing before. Auroville can also do this, but it will have to pull down its own 'Berlin Wall'. Secondly, actively support and stimulate people to start businesses.

Manuel: You'll have to do a lot of creative thinking about how to stimulate promote commerce and industry. For example, how can access to capital be made easy? You could consider approaching the State Bank of India (SBI) for a loan facility of say Rs 50 crores, against a guarantee for repayment of interest

The negative attitude towards business has to change. Auroville must actively support and stimulate people to start business

and capital by the Auroville Foundation. Loans could then be extended to a unit with the approval of the relevant Auroville body, say the FAMC. In view of the special nature of Auroville, the SBI may even be willing to negotiate a lower rate.

Another way would be to create an Auroville Investment Fund, as part of the Auroville Foundation. This Fund could even draw grants and donations from outside to make up its core capital. But it would have to be absolutely professionally managed; the people cannot allow themselves to be softhearted, which is a common difficulty in small communities.

Henk: In respect of financing, the role of the Auroville Foundation should be looked at. So far, the Auroville Foundation has not done anything more than to allow new business units to get established as part of one of its trusts. But it is up to the unit executive to bring his or her own money into the unit by way of donation or loan, or borrow from friends, and take the full risk for any losses, while the Auroville Foundation is in fact the ultimate beneficiary of what the commercial unit brings in. But so far the Foundation has been sitting on the fence, while it could stimulate business by standing guarantee for loans.

Manuel: Another question to study is how venture capital can come into the Auroville business scheme. At present, there is no possibility for joint ventures. An outsider who would like to support an Auroville business can only give loans directly, for which the unit would need the permission of the Foundation. He cannot participate in share capital as would be normal outside Auroville. But it is through joint ventures with outsiders that the required capital can be supplied. The Trust system doesn't allow for this. You would need a corporate entity in which the Foundation owns 50% or more and the outside entity the balance.

Henk: Auroville is not the first or only institution that struggles with this type of problem. I have experience with the Mondragon Cooperative system in Spain. They too reached a point where they had to solve the question of how to interact with the outside world, and draw the outside world in. It is always possible with lawyers to find solutions that are not blurring the ideology.

During your presentation, someone observed that there are three pillars of Auroville's economy – commercial, grants and individual monies – so that a defect in the commercial pillar is not so serious after all.

Henk: I take a different view. The presentation has shown that the commercial sector is a cause for worry. It is not a healthy proposition to depend on grants and donations or on individual money.

Take the Centre for Urban Research, for instance. This 1.5 crore (US \$ 300,000) building is created from grants and donations. But 80% goes into building materials and local labour, which is a cash flow into the surrounding economy. But for how many Aurovilians does such a project provide maintenance? Only a few, so the net impact of this donation is very limited for that aspect of Auroville's economy. Or take the recent Asia-Urbs conference that Auroville organized. How much money flows back into Auroville itself, how much into hotels in Pondicherry etc.? Grants and donations are all very well and necessary, but they generate only a limited so-called "value added" that contributes to building an economic base for the expanding township. In contrast, if you look at the commercial units, the estimate is that they employ about 150 and 225 Aurovilians directly, who benefit their families and a far larger number of employees from the surroundings on a permanent basis. (By the way, as we do not know the exact figures, it would be good if Auroville would keep statistics about how many employees and Aurovilians work in a unit at the beginning and the end of each financial year.)

When we talk about individual monies, we have also to be careful. What we mean is that an individual doesn't depend on the community (so doesn't take money from the community in the form of maintenance or salary or so) and provides voluntary work. That, by itself, is great. But it

Businesses have to be recognized as providers of employment and economic value to the community

also shows that some units, particularly service units, could not function without this free work. And that is another cause for worry.

So one can't really speak of three pillars of strength. The commercial pillar is weak. The pillar of grants and donations may undermine an economic structure of self-sustainability because one gets used to a culture of fostering grants and donations. And the pillar of individual monies, though impressive, indicates the failing of the community to sustain itself – services that depend on this source should realize that they might become bankrupt as soon as this source drops away.

You have argued that 'Auroville' is an excellent brand name. Could you explain this?

Manuel: The brand name 'Auroville' stands in India for high quality – the positive aspect – and for above average price – the negative aspect. Consequently,

Auroville's market is the niche market in the upper Indian middle class. If prices are slightly lowered, the turnover might increase drastically.

Henk: But you need to monitor the use of the brand name. At present it enjoys goodwill. But it is not a guarantee for tomorrow. If there is a scandal in a newspaper about one of your products, it would damage the brand name beyond quick repair, and there have been cases where Auroville products were rejected. So this brings in the need for standardization of product quality, and once again, the need for a body to help small units to meet the minimum levels of standards in product quality, packaging etc.

Manuel: In this respect we should mention that Auroville busi-

There is not a single commercial unit in Auroville, except for Maroma, where one can speak of a strong economic and commercial position

nesses have an excellent social policy, probably because of Auroville's ideology. Employees can attain higher standards of living, there is interest in providing them with training, and the motivation of people and the working conditions are good. Here Auroville leads the way. It is not hire and fire, and some unit-executives even experience a personal trauma when they have to lay-off workers, as happened recently.

You mentioned that there are quite a few units that are actually loss-making.

Manuel: Yes, there are. But before passing judgment, one should investigate why a unit makes losses. Is it because of lack of access to capital, or because its products have become obsolete, a lack of marketing, a deficient pricing policy? Auroville needs a group authorized to identify loss-making units as the negative signals emerge, and assist them. If you can't find a solution, close the unit. That may be hard, but probably it will be half as hard as a postponement and having to close the unit later at far higher costs.

Henk: Our main point is that there is not a single commercial unit in Auroville, except for Maroma, where one can speak of a strong economic and commercial position. Also, no group exists that does strategic planning of business, studies sectors and comes forward with proposals.

Looking from outside, do you feel that Auroville is hampered by its high ideals?

Manuel: No. It is the ideology that made you come here in the first place. I admire the fact that Auroville has been able to be together for this length of time. I do not have a negative outlook, but see negative tendencies perhaps more clearly than those who are part of the community. But the ideology should allow you to do things better – not hamper you.

Henk: I have been coming to Auroville almost yearly since 1990. I have noticed that the relative isolated and introverted position of Auroville, which I observed in 1990, has changed enormously. Today you talk about the bio-region instead of

Auroville; there is the international seed-saving program; there is the world interaction with Asia Urbs; you are trying to create a new internal organization learning from what the outside has to offer you, while there are not that many models in the world that can serve as a mirror for Auroville.

But the economic area is not in a good shape, and there you have to concentrate on bringing it up to standard. This requires rational thinking.

Also, you have to have a close look at the motivations of the people who join Auroville at present. It is normal in movements such as Auroville that the first and second generation are very motivated, but that the third generation has different expectations – in the sense that they take for granted what Auroville offers to them, not realizing sufficiently what efforts were needed in the past and what is required of them to sustain and expand Auroville as a growing township. Then there is an influx of retired people who may not be planning to put in the work that is necessary.

You stated that Auroville cannot allow itself the luxury to experiment with 'no-money economy' models.

Henk: At present Auroville lacks the basis to form its own internal money economy. I guess that only a township of say 30-40,000 people can provide the base to experiment with internal exchange models. At present, in view of the economic uncertainties, Mother's "no-exchange of money" economy is definitely a bridge too far.

The best book I have read on alternative money systems is by Bernard Lietaer. He recommends introducing complementary systems, systems in addition to existing ones, not substituting them. But I cannot see how that could work in Auroville.

Is this White Paper the final word on the commercial units' performance?

Manuel: No. The White Paper is only an interim document, which mainly concentrates on the performance of the commercial units. In about six months we hope to present the full research study, which will include other material and also some fresh recommendations on the basis of the observations that we received during our presentations. Also, we would like to incorporate the financial results of the year 2001-2002. We have seen a downward trend in the last few years. If there is an upswing, that would be a relief.

Henk: But we are rather afraid we will see that the down-swing has continued, also in view of the September 11 after-effects, as it has done everywhere in India. If this is the case, it will mean a severe reduction in the level of the contributions the units will be able to make to the Central Fund – also in view of their previous losses – and that may mean that the Economy Group will have to cut expenses in the service sector instead of providing the increases which many consider absolutely necessary.

That is a sobering observation since a sustainable township is not possible without a sound and sizeable commercial sector.

Interview by Caryl

Preventing water contamination

Dysfunctional waste-water and solid waste management systems may lead to pollution of groundwater

Auroville has about 170 wells from which it draws water. According to Auroville Water Harvest, only 50% of these wells are properly sealed, protected and maintained. In quite a few communities, waste water and solid waste management are not functioning properly, which can lead to contamination of ground water. Water Harvest is concentrated on studying and monitoring water in general, that is, the quality of ground water, wells, tanks and drinking water sources. They have identified 89 public places (schools, restaurants, community kitchens, food processing units and guest houses) where the drinking water should be monitored once a month.

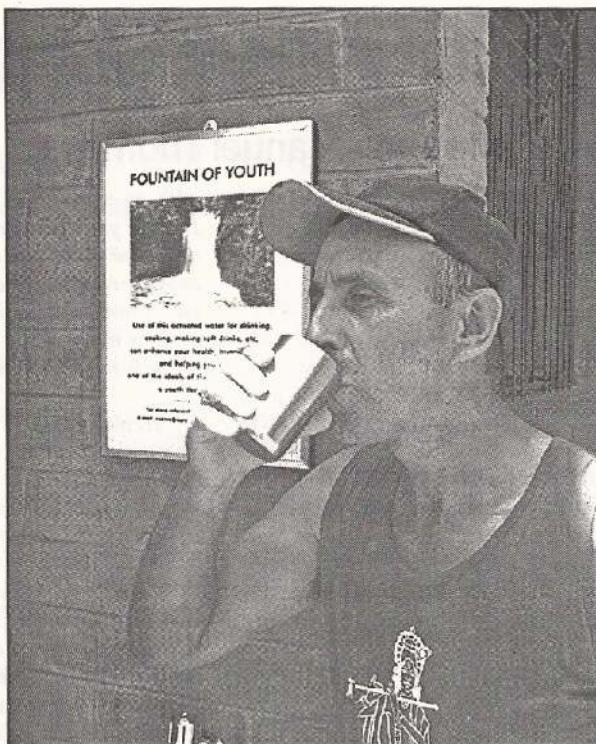
A case in point is the situation at the Solar Kitchen, which is facing serious wastewater related problems. The waste-water treatment plant of the kitchen has never been completed due to lack of funds and is, consequently, not functioning properly. It has become a breeding ground for flies, mosquitoes and pathogens. Wastewater is flushed out into a pond behind the kitchen, but as the wastewater has not been adequately treated, there is an increasing danger that it will pollute the aquifer, which supplies the nearby well.

In fact, during a routine analysis in April, the tap water of the Solar kitchen was found to contain *Escherichia coli* (E-coli) bacteria which have as their source human and animal excreta. Although

the presence of E-coli in water is quite common, in this case the count was too high. Chlorination of all the Solar Kitchen water provided an immediate solution, but more needs to be done soon. The completion of the wastewater treatment plant is the first priority, next to the disinfection of the well and its proper sealing. Then the use of Effective Microorganisms should become mandatory, says Dr. Margarita Correa, an Aurovilian connected to the Auroville unit Auroannam, which advises on the use of Effective Micro-organism (EM) technology for water purification and other purposes all over India. For beneficial microorganisms kill pathogenic bacteria. A number of individuals and communities in Auroville have meanwhile started using EM in their waste water treatment successfully.

Auroville Water Harvest in collaboration with the Auroville Environmental Monitoring Service in Aurobrindavan does the routine analysis of Auroville's water sources. The latter recently received funding, through the Asia Urbs programme, for the purchase of equipment to analyse water, soil and food for the presence of heavy metals and pesticides.

There is also interest in studying the larger per-



Rolf drinking from the 'Fountain of Youth' tap at the Solar Kitchen. Research by Peter Gross in Germany resulted in the invention of the Wateraktivator, which provides activated water free from any form of contamination. It is also claimed it eliminates toxins from the body and changes the structure of the cells and makes the drinker biologically younger. The Wateraktivator installed at the Solar Kitchen was brought from Germany through the assistance of AVI Deutschland.

spective. In 2001, the Auroville Waste Water Management Body was formed with the prime objective of monitoring the treatment of wastewater in Auroville. The group will study existing treatment plants and those proposed for new communities.

Emmanuelle

Them Solar Kitchen Blues

Concerns about the presence of E-coli bacteria in the water supply caused the Solar Kitchen to overhaul its water treatment system in May. At one time it looked as if the Solar Kitchen would have to close for the whole month. The prospect brought many Aurovilians out in a cold sweat and stimulated Alan to compose this poem, which, for obvious reasons, has not been included in our poetry section.

Mournfully, to the tune of 'Turnin' up Turnips in Tennessee'

When I woke up this morning
My blood kinda froze,
Well I woke up this morning
With snow on my toes,
'Cos today is the day
The kitchen will close.

They said it was better
They said it was care,
To keep them dam' critters
From spoilin' our fare,
But what they don't tell us
Is how to eat air.

I asked ol' Ben Wishbone
What would he do now,
He looked kinda saggy -
"Jest sold my cow,
"But I'll milk my tame mongoose
When I learn how."

I saw Aurovilians
Roamin' like sheep,
Nibblin' at branches,
Diggin' real deep
Fer roots and young buggies -
It made me fair weep.

The best and the brightest
Redooced to mere ghosts,
Scrabblin' for insects,
Chewin' goal-posts,
Frantically fightin'
Fer a scrap of pale toast.

But then I met Lizzy
She looked quite a sight,
Smilin' around her,
Laughin' outright,
"Don't need no sol kitchen,
I'm livin' on light".

I asked fer her secret,
I sat at her feet,
She went kinda silent,
Then blushed like a beet:
"I've trained my e-coli
To pretend that they're meat,

Or sometimes spaghetti
And sometimes ice-cream,
Occasionally tofu
Or even baked beans."
She munched kinda vaguely,
Lost in a dream.

And when it opened up again,
They trailed back from afar,
Not so many as before,
Thinner now and scarred,
And nobody dared mention
The ones who'd crossed the bar...

Alan

AGRICULTURE

Annadana: Food for Thought

A conference of the South-Asia Network of Soil & Seed Savers took place in Auroville to discuss strategies for saving the seeds

In the second week of March the Visitors Centre field buzzed with the presence of a very mixed crowd, invited to Auroville through a notice appearing online to 350 NGOs all over India and Southeast Asia. Seventy people arrived to participate in the conference, under a colorful pandal tent pitched near the cafeteria and amidst a wonderful atmosphere created by the Annadana crew: seed sample displays, and exhibit tables brimming with the season's harvest of shapely gourds, squashes and melons, tomatoes red, yellow and purple, colorful ears of maize and Star of David lady fingers, and bright posters showing vegetable and flower collections from around the world. In the middle of this show of nature's abundance chairs and blackboard took the focus, where presenters shared their knowledge on gardening and genetic heritage. Kokopelli Association, France, sponsored the whole conference, and visitors were treated to stays in some of Auroville's finest guesthouses. Lovely meals and teas were provided, which included samples of some of Auroville's own grains and vegetables in the lunch menus.

The purpose of the gathering was to discuss strategies for the saving of seeds, especially of well-loved varieties of vegetables, and for promoting the growing of these in kitchen and home gardens. Rather than commercial incentive, this initiative is to reintegrate traditions of better health and nutrition through interaction with one's immediate environment - the garden. A way to do this is to grow vegetables and successfully save their genetic heritage (seeds) from year to year, sharing these with friends and neighbors, and create local seed networks. The "farmers" who attended

came from everywhere: agriculturalists, home gardeners, Non-Governmental organisations and rural development consultants, writers, and activists from places like Bangladesh, Himachal Pradesh, New Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Chennai, Chingleput, Trichy, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Hawaii. A large part of the time was devoted to hearing each tell their experiences of promoting biodiversity through their own work. Besides discussions under the tent, there was a brilliant (literally!) guided tour by Stephane, to see garden cultivation and seed multiplication work at the new Auroville Botanical Gardens site, and then also two evening sessions in the SAWCHU pavilion.

The organizers responsible for topics and activities were Dominique Guillet and Bernard Declercq, supported by Stephane, Isha and Maurice (for Annadana network) and help from many of the project's current volunteers. Dominique gave an overall introduction to the work of Kokopelli Association, and on maintaining purity of "open-pollinated" varieties and low-cost techniques for the prevention of cross-pollination. This was supported by the 60-page preparatory booklet provided for conference participants, providing a detailed species lists of exotic and indigenous food plants, and documenting a series of letters comprising the recent hot debate on the pros and cons of introduced "exotics".

The concerns raised about introduction of "alien species" were heard out during the course of the weekend. The simplest research into a history of economic botany clearly shows that (food) plants have been traveling around the world, taking root in "traditional" diets as long as man has prac-

ticed cultivation (approximately 10,000 years). Most "Indian" vegetables (i.e. chillies, tomatoes), and some staples (ie: millets, maize), are "imports" from other countries! With organic agriculture there is no chemical intervention when diseases and infestation arise in weak, unhealthy plants, so only the healthy ones remain in the field for seed collection. And many newly introduced varieties will not survive in new climatic conditions without artificial technology, so there is a natural process of selection - only the best suited survive to create the seeds of the future.

Why are seeds so hard to find in India today, and mostly from big seed companies? Many varieties of vegetables were in wide use here during the last 100 years, but these have mostly vanished with the advent of hybrid seeds (not reproducing "true to type") requiring more chemical inputs and watering, and producing useless seeds. People have given over their self-reliance to commercial and scientific organizations. Sunita Rao, respected speaker and organizer of the environmental NGO Kalpavriksh, points out that there is a big demand for good quality, open-pollinated seeds by women farmers for their home gardens. She called for a non-divisive approach to achieving what is in everybody's best interests: assuring access to genetic resources and biodiversity. There is the need to work on the local level with a strong regional support, she explained.

What followed was formation of a statement of purpose - a charter for the ongoing work of making more and better seeds available to gardeners and small-scale farmers. Existing organizations and development networks are already in the best position to begin

"seed wealth centers", to collect sample seeds of local open-pollinated varieties, with special attention to unique types, and preserve these vegetable seeds for gardeners who may not do it on their own. The next step is to pass on seeds to other farmers and gardeners sure to save seed of the next generation, who will also return a certain amount to the main center.

There is a tremendous need for research and documentation, to collate information about open-pollinated types still available in villages. This data will include location, origin, physiological characteristics, local name, qualities such as medicinal value, micronutrient content, pest resistance, etc. Of special interest are local skills in cultivation practices, planting times, seed selection and preservation, and the screening for the adaptability of seeds imported from outside the immediate region. Lastly, but very much in demand, is the need to organize skill-sharing workshops with farmers and gardeners on all technical aspects related to seeds and vegetable growing. Annadana is ready to provide encouragement in the form of technical assistance for those ready to begin.

This informative and inspiring event closed with a dinner at Athiti Griha guesthouse on the Sunday evening. The work has only just begun, but everyone expressed profound appreciation for the chance to meet together in Auroville, and for the added dimension of depth, reflection and beauty that Auroville (and Aurovilians working together) impresses on those who come here to share and learn!

Isha

Towards an integral Matrimandir

Regarding the present clash of perspectives at Matrimandir, it's possible to discern, beyond the play of egos and personal predispositions, two different tendencies which have been active in Auroville from the very beginning (and which, indeed, may be archetypal). On the one hand, the 'Rogerian' approach represents boldness, élan, the refusal to be trammelled by existing conditions in the leap towards new dawns. On the other hand, the proponents of the park seem to be the latest representatives of a consciousness which draws energy and wisdom from the earth, nature, from that which naturally unfolds.

One perspective favours sweep, expansion, transcendence; the other focuses upon 'groundedness', being, detail. In terms of evolution one is disjunctive, the other gradualist.

The value of Rogerian boldness lies in its attempt to escape the gravitational drag of the status quo. The danger is of it degenerating into grand gestures which are divorced from anything deeper. The value of the nurturing vision is that it roots us in the energy of the here and now. The danger is of parochialism, of small-mindedness, which prevents us from grasping the larger issues and moving forward.

In terms of Matrimandir it's interesting to observe that Mother, in her differing contact with certain individuals, was seemingly encouraging – or, at least, not discouraging –

quite different perspectives. In terms of the gardens, for example, she seemed to be blessing simultaneously (if Amrit is correct about the dates) the minimalist concept of Roger AND the more extensive Japanese-influenced gardens which Narad was preparing to plant.

Mother's blessings, of course, have to be interpreted with care. She herself warned that they were no guarantee of a specific wish or project reaching fruition. Rather, she explained, they are a sign that she is putting her force behind a particular process which, depending upon the integrity and aspiration of the individual or group, could either be positive or negative in outcome.

Nevertheless, if Mother was, indeed, simultaneously putting her force behind the apparently divergent perspectives of Roger and Narad, it gives one pause for thought. Why would she do this?

If we are only talking about Mother's relationship with individual sadhaks, the answer seems fairly clear. For Mother related to each individual in a unique way, and her approach or advice to two different individuals could appear absolutely contradictory. However, here the issue is not simply 'personal'. It is the future shape and composition of the Matrimandir gardens, which Mother once described as being as important as the Matrimandir itself.

One possibility is that by blessing both Roger and Narad she was simply putting the

different pieces in play knowing that, in the process of materialization and through the participants' deepening understanding, new ideas and solutions would be thrown up. But another clue to her intention may lie in what she expressed in December 1969 in response to difficulties in getting the designer and architect to collaborate over Matrimandir:

"I see very well the possibility of using the most contradictory elements AT THE SAME TIME (sic)...with a little skill, that's all. It's not exclusive, I don't say, 'Oh, no, not that!' No, no, no: everything, everything all together. That's what I want: to succeed in creating a place where opposites can unite."

Ideally, perhaps, the Matrimandir would have been constructed by yogis who already embodied integrality, the higher synthesis of opposites. However, in the absence of integral yogis Mother appeared to adopt another course, working with each individual's capacities to realize a different aspect of what she was manifesting at Matrimandir. Through Paulo, for example, she seemed to be expressing the inspiring ideal, through Roger the bold lines, through Piero the need for strength, stability and attention to detail.

The problem is that, lacking Mother's integral vision or specific guidance (as is the case with the Inner Chamber) we often snatch at one or other of her indications – often on the basis of our own predispositions – and elevate that to the status of 'Mother want-

ed...'. And thus, rather than being the "place where opposites can unite", we tend to turn Matrimandir into a polarizing lens which diffracts us into all the colours of the spectrum.

And yet the clues are before us, for Matrimandir – in spite of some of us making our best attempts to thwart it! – already provides us with a wonderful example of the synthesis of opposites in the way that the glittering outer skin of golden disks encloses a simple white inner chamber. For as we move backwards and forwards between richness of outer expression and simplicity of essence, the traditional polarities are transformed into a dance or continuum of complementary energies.

I have no idea how the present impasse regarding the status of the outer gardens/park will be resolved. As has happened before at Matrimandir, we appear to be confronted with mutually exclusive courses of action. Yet if we try to grasp the essence, the truth, of each perspective rather than simply its outward expression we may discover to our surprise that each, in some way, needs the other for its most complete expression. For doesn't revelation imply concealment? Doesn't expansion take its stand upon stillness?

And so begins our journey towards a higher synthesis. Or – who knows? – something else altogether...

Alan

CULTURE

Altérités: Bridging Continents



From left to right: the "algoja" played by Taga Ram Bheel, the "kamaicha" played by Hakim Khan, Yann Argenton on the guitar, Jean Marie Henry on percussion, Kutla Khan with the "dholak", Jhalal Khan with the harmonium, Xavier Martin on drums, Manuel Aguilar and Nishit Mehta on the piano.

It was a unique spectacle of musical and cultural fusion. Musicians from east and west, performing on traditional and modern instruments, met to explore new horizons.

All through the concert, I listened as if under a spell. Whether it was the powerful, moving voice of Jhalal Khan, Manuel Aguilar's passionate Spanish lyrics, the plaintive notes of the "kamaicha" (the oldest string and bow instrument known to man) played by Hakim Khan, the magical tunes of the "algoja" (a pair of flutes played simultaneously) by Taga Ram Bheel, the impressive solos on the "dholak" (a drum which originated in the Moghul courts) by Kutla Khan, the African and western percussion, played by Jean Marie Henry and Xavier Martin respectively, Yann Argenton's gentle strums on the guitar or Nishit Mehta's soothing notes on the piano...there was no doubt, this was truly music with a soul. The audience was carried by the music, the body felt compelled to sway to the captivating rhythms. The musicians, using their musical instruments and voices not only as mediums of expression but also as extensions of themselves, conversed, communicated, creating a rich dialogue. The magic and mystery of the orient met the passionate romanticism of the Mediterranean.

Manuel Aguilar, who founded MTDS (a French based association which organised the Altérités project) wrote the texts and composed the music for the concert, together with

Nishit Mehta, and twenty year old Yann Argenton, the youngest of the group.

In their own words: "Musicians of different and diverse musical origins and formations – including Rajasthani, Spanish, Jazz and Afro-Latin – have invented a new, poetic language, a poetic universe – a new continent where inner worlds can express themselves-free and equal."

They had met only six weeks before starting on their Indian tour and played together and experimented in the Rajasthan desert. They had then moved on to Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat, but were forced to leave due to the communal riots taking place there.

In these times when intolerance, violence and strife are rampant, not only in India, but the world over to witness, through music, the transcending of barriers, of differences of origins, ethnicity and religion brings much joy and hope...

Altérités was truly a unique and inspiring experience for the audience, as it must have been for the musicians themselves, who, it could be felt, intensely enjoyed every second of the performance.

At the end of the concert, the audience broke into an enthusiastic, well-deserved ovation, and shouted for more. Let us hope that Altérités will come again, to share with us another beautiful experience.

Emmanuelle

SPORTS

From Ball to Basket

For many children growing up in Auroville, "shooting basket" is a rite of passage. Hours spent watching various basketball games in play at New Creation sports ground or Certitude or even the small court in Aspiration, nurtures secret desires to somehow participate in the game later. Sometimes, even the sound of the ball bouncing on the court is enough.

Crossing all boundaries, more than 100 young and old, men and women and boys and girls from within Auroville and the surrounding villages regularly participate in the different basketball clubs here.

For 24 year old Martanda, who has been playing basketball since about the age of 11, childhood is full of happy memories "drooling on the side of the court" as he puts it, watching others play the game. An early start saw him joining the girls' volleyball team because there weren't enough players, but progression to the giddy heights of the men's basketball team was swift as he soon proved his ability on court.

23 year old Shanti would hear the rhythmic bounce of the ball on a nearby court from her home in Shakti – wondering what the sound was until one day she found herself somehow drawn closer. She would watch the game from a distance, unbeknown to the players until finally the call to join was too strong. Meeting the team they asked her if she would like to play with them. Four and a half years later she is one of their strongest players.

Sarasu, another basketball devotee, first started playing around age 16 (she is now 25), and hardly remembers how it all started, but confesses to feeling terrible if she goes for even one day without playing, it is now so much part of her life!

This year they all participated in a national level championship, together with Angelai, Palani and Ravi and they have recently returned from a 2-week basketball tournament in the Punjab. Belonging to the

Pondicherry Association of Basketball, every year, the Pondicherry State teams handpick 5 or 6 young hopefuls from the 9 existing groups of Auroville teams for these national events. Basketball is the only sport played in Auroville, where young people get an opportunity to travel out, experiencing some of the richness of the rest of India, and also to interact with others with a similar love for the game.

They all feel that there should be more interaction though – not just by playing in the various national and state level tournaments, of which there are many, but perhaps by integrating basketball playing with different school teams. Of course the need for good coaching remains.

National games are fiercely competitive with dedicated players under a lot of pressure to keep their winning images together. Whilst other teams are often stronger and faster, having undergone much more intensive training, Sarasu, Martanda and Shanti are nothing if not full of a sense of fun as they say this can take the pressure off, since you don't have to worry about winning. Laughing they respond "We just go and kick and bite them!" But on a more serious note, it is a good experience, travelling to new places and seeing new things – and they all just love watching others play – particularly some of the really top-notch players.

Basketball is communication – responding to other players and developing your own skills as well as being quite an intense activity – with lots of jumping, coordinating, running at high speeds and using your intuition. It also brings people together more and is an opportunity to develop many friendships as people play the game. Often sharing just a little bit of your life with somebody else in a way that creates something in common helps people to connect and understand each other better. Maybe everybody in Auroville should start to play?

Priya Mahtani

Preventing water contamination

Dysfunctional waste-water and solid waste management systems may lead to pollution of groundwater

Auroville has about 170 wells from which it draws water. According to Auroville Water Harvest, only 50% of these wells are properly sealed, protected and maintained. In quite a few communities, waste water and solid waste management are not functioning properly, which can lead to contamination of ground water. Water Harvest is concentrated on studying and monitoring water in general, that is, the quality of ground water, wells, tanks and drinking water sources. They have identified 89 public places (schools, restaurants, community kitchens, food processing units and guest houses) where the drinking water should be monitored once a month.

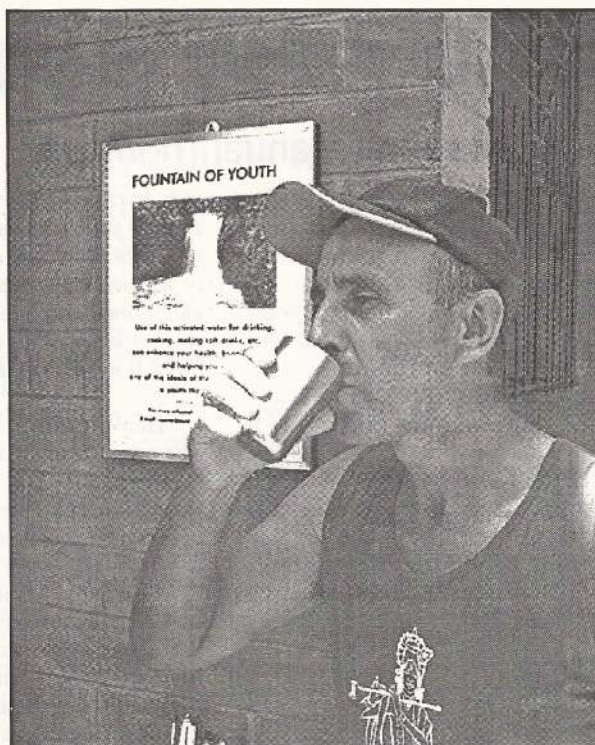
A case in point is the situation at the Solar Kitchen, which is facing serious wastewater related problems. The waste-water treatment plant of the kitchen has never been completed due to lack of funds and is, consequently, not functioning properly. It has become a breeding ground for flies, mosquitoes and pathogens. Wastewater is flushed out into a pond behind the kitchen, but as the wastewater has not been adequately treated, there is an increasing danger that it will pollute the aquifer, which supplies the nearby well.

In fact, during a routine analysis in April, the tap water of the Solar kitchen was found to contain *Escherichia coli* (E-coli) bacteria which have as their source human and animal excreta. Although

the presence of E-coli in water is quite common, in this case the count was too high. Chlorination of all the Solar Kitchen water provided an immediate solution, but more needs to be done soon. The completion of the wastewater treatment plant is the first priority, next to the disinfection of the well and its proper sealing. Then the use of Effective Microorganisms should become mandatory, says Dr. Margarita Correa, an Aurovilian connected to the Auroville unit Auroannam, which advises on the use of Effective Micro-organism (EM) technology for water purification and other purposes all over India. For beneficial microorganisms kill pathogenic bacteria. A number of individuals and communities in Auroville have meanwhile started using EM in their waste water treatment successfully.

Auroville Water Harvest in collaboration with the Auroville Environmental Monitoring Service in Aurobindavan does the routine analysis of Auroville's water sources. The latter recently received funding, through the Asia Urbs programme, for the purchase of equipment to analyse water, soil and food for the presence of heavy metals and pesticides.

There is also interest in studying the larger per-



Rolf drinking from the 'Fountain of Youth' tap at the Solar Kitchen. Research by Peter Gross in Germany resulted in the invention of the Wateraktivator, which provides activated water free from any form of contamination. It is also claimed it eliminates toxins from the body and changes the structure of the cells and makes the drinker biologically younger. The Wateraktivator installed at the Solar Kitchen was brought from Germany through the assistance of AVI Deutschland.

spective. In 2001, the Auroville Waste Water Management Body was formed with the prime objective of monitoring the treatment of wastewater in Auroville. The group will study existing treatment plants and those proposed for new communities.

Emmanuelle

Them Solar Kitchen Blues

Concerns about the presence of E-coli bacteria in the water supply caused the Solar Kitchen to overhaul its water treatment system in May. At one time it looked as if the Solar Kitchen would have to close for the whole month. The prospect brought many Aurovilians out in a cold sweat and stimulated Alan to compose this poem, which, for obvious reasons, has not been included in our poetry section.

Mournfully, to the tune of 'Turnin' up Turnips in Tennessee'

When I woke up this morning
My blood kinda froze,
Well I woke up this morning
With snow on my toes,
'Cos today is the day
The kitchen will close.

They said it was better
They said it was care,
To keep them dam' critters
From spoilin' our fare,
But what they don't tell us
Is how to eat air.

I asked ol' Ben Wishbone
What would he do now,
He looked kinda saggy -
"Jest sold my cow,
"But I'll milk my tame mongoose
When I learn how."

I saw Aurovilians
Roamin' like sheep,
Nibblin' at branches,
Diggin' real deep
Fer roots and young buggies -
It made me fair weep.

The best and the brightest
Redooced to mere ghosts,
Scrabblin' for insects,
Chewin' goal-posts,
Frantically fightin'
Fer a scrap of pale toast.

But then I met Lizzy
She looked quite a sight,
Smilin' around her,
Laughin' outright,
"Don't need no sol kitchen,
I'm livin' on light".

I asked fer her secret,
I sat at her feet,
She went kinda silent,
Then blushed like a beet:
"I've trained my e-coli
To pretend that they're meat,

Or sometimes spaghetti
And sometimes ice-cream,
Occasionally tofu
Or even baked beans."
She munched kinda vaguely,
Lost in a dream.

And when it opened up again,
They trailed back from afar,
Not so many as before,
Thinner now and scarred,
And nobody dared mention
The ones who'd crossed the bar...

Alan

AGRICULTURE

Annadana: Food for Thought

A conference of the South-Asia Network of Soil & Seed Savers took place in Auroville to discuss strategies for saving the seeds

In the second week of March the Visitors Centre field buzzed with the presence of a very mixed crowd, invited to Auroville through a notice appearing online to 350 NGOs all over India and Southeast Asia. Seventy people arrived to participate in the conference, under a colorful pandal tent pitched near the cafeteria and amidst a wonderful atmosphere created by the Annadana crew: seed sample displays, and exhibit tables brimming with the season's harvest of shapely gourds, squashes and melons, tomatoes red, yellow and purple, colorful ears of maize and Star of David lady fingers, and bright posters showing vegetable and flower collections from around the world. In the middle of this show of nature's abundance chairs and blackboard took the focus, where presenters shared their knowledge on gardening and genetic heritage. Kokopelli Association, France, sponsored the whole conference, and visitors were treated to stays in some of Auroville's finest guesthouses. Lovely meals and teas were provided, which included samples of some of Auroville's own grains and vegetables in the lunch menus.

The purpose of the gathering was to discuss strategies for the saving of seeds, especially of well-loved varieties of vegetables, and for promoting the growing of these in kitchen and home gardens. Rather than commercial incentive, this initiative is to reintegrate traditions of better health and nutrition through interaction with one's immediate environment - the garden. A way to do this is to grow vegetables and successfully save their genetic heritage (seeds) from year to year, sharing these with friends and neighbors, and create local seed networks. The "farmers" who attended

came from everywhere: agriculturalists, home gardeners, Non-Governmental organisations and rural development consultants, writers, and activists from places like Bangladesh, Himachal Pradesh, New Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Chennai, Chingleput, Trichy, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Hawaii. A large part of the time was devoted to hearing each tell their experiences of promoting biodiversity through their own work. Besides discussions under the tent, there was a brilliant (literally!) guided tour by Stephane, to see garden cultivation and seed multiplication work at the new Auroville Botanical Gardens site, and then also two evening sessions in the SAWCHU pavilion.

The organizers responsible for topics and activities were Dominique Guillet and Bernard Declercq, supported by Stephane, Isha and Mauricette (for Annadana network) and help from many of the project's current volunteers. Dominique gave an overall introduction to the work of Kokopelli Association, and on maintaining purity of "open-pollinated" varieties and low-cost techniques for the prevention of cross-pollination. This was supported by the 60-page preparatory booklet provided for conference participants, providing a detailed species lists of exotic and indigenous food plants, and documenting a series of letters comprising the recent hot debate on the pros and cons of introduced "exotics".

The concerns raised about introduction of "alien species" were heard out during the course of the weekend. The simplest research into a history of economic botany clearly shows that (food) plants have been traveling around the world, taking root in "traditional" diets as long as man has prac-

ticed cultivation (approximately 10,000 years). Most "Indian" vegetables (i.e. chillies, tomatoes), and some staples (ie: millets, maize), are "imports" from other countries! With organic agriculture there is no chemical intervention when diseases and infestation arise in weak, unhealthy plants, so only the healthy ones remain in the field for seed collection. And many newly introduced varieties will not survive in new climatic conditions without artificial technology, so there is a natural process of selection - only the best suited survive to create the seeds of the future.

Why are seeds so hard to find in India today, and mostly from big seed companies? Many varieties of vegetables were in wide use here during the last 100 years, but these have mostly vanished with the advent of hybrid seeds (not reproducing "true to type") requiring more chemical inputs and watering, and producing useless seeds. People have given over their self-reliance to commercial and scientific organizations. Sunita Rao, respected speaker and organizer of the environmental NGO Kalpavris, points out that there is a big demand for good quality, open-pollinated seeds by women farmers for their home gardens. She called for a non-divisive approach to achieving what is in everybody's best interests: assuring access to genetic resources and biodiversity. There is the need to work on the local level with a strong regional support, she explained.

What followed was formation of a statement of purpose - a charter for the ongoing work of making more and better seeds available to gardeners and small-scale farmers. Existing organizations and development networks are already in the best position to begin

"seed wealth centers", to collect sample seeds of local open-pollinated varieties, with special attention to unique types, and preserve these vegetable seeds for gardeners who may not do it on their own. The next step is to pass on seeds to other farmers and gardeners sure to save seed of the next generation, who will also return a certain amount to the main center.

There is a tremendous need for research and documentation, to collate information about open-pollinated types still available in villages. This data will include location, origin, physiological characteristics, local name, qualities such as medicinal value, micronutrient content, pest resistance, etc. Of special interest are local skills in cultivation practices, planting times, seed selection and preservation, and the screening for the adaptability of seeds imported from outside the immediate region. Lastly, but very much in demand, is the need to organize skill-sharing workshops with farmers and gardeners on all technical aspects related to seeds and vegetable growing. Annadana is ready to provide encouragement in the form of technical assistance for those ready to begin.

This informative and inspiring event closed with a dinner at Athiti Griha guesthouse on the Sunday evening. The work has only just begun, but everyone expressed profound appreciation for the chance to meet together in Auroville, and for the added dimension of depth, reflection and beauty that Auroville (and Aurovilians working together) impresses on those who come here to share and learn!

Isha

Towards an integral Matrimandir

Regarding the present clash of perspectives at Matrimandir, it's possible to discern, beyond the play of egos and personal predispositions, two different tendencies which have been active in Auroville from the very beginning (and which, indeed, may be archetypal). On the one hand, the 'Rogerian' approach represents boldness, élan, the refusal to be trammelled by existing conditions in the leap towards new dawns. On the other hand, the proponents of the park seem to be the latest representatives of a consciousness which draws energy and wisdom from the earth, nature, from that which naturally unfolds.

One perspective favours sweep, expansion, transcendence; the other focuses upon 'groundedness', being, detail. In terms of evolution one is disjunctive, the other gradualist.

The value of Rogerian boldness lies in its attempt to escape the gravitational drag of the status quo. The danger is of it degenerating into grand gestures which are divorced from anything deeper. The value of the nurturing vision is that it roots us in the energy of the here and now. The danger is of parochialism, of small-mindedness, which prevents us from grasping the larger issues and moving forward.

In terms of Matrimandir it's interesting to observe that Mother, in her differing contact with certain individuals, was seemingly encouraging – or, at least, not discouraging –

quite different perspectives. In terms of the gardens, for example, she seemed to be blessing simultaneously (if Amrit is correct about the dates) the minimalist concept of Roger AND the more extensive Japanese-influenced gardens which Narad was preparing to plant.

Mother's blessings, of course, have to be interpreted with care. She herself warned that they were no guarantee of a specific wish or project reaching fruition. Rather, she explained, they are a sign that she is putting her force behind a particular process which, depending upon the integrity and aspiration of the individual or group, could either be positive or negative in outcome.

Nevertheless, if Mother was, indeed, simultaneously putting her force behind the apparently divergent perspectives of Roger and Narad, it gives one pause for thought. Why would she do this?

If we are only talking about Mother's relationship with individual sadhaks, the answer seems fairly clear. For Mother related to each individual in a unique way, and her approach or advice to two different individuals could appear absolutely contradictory. However, here the issue is not simply 'personal'. It is the future shape and composition of the Matrimandir gardens, which Mother once described as being as important as the Matrimandir itself.

One possibility is that by blessing both Roger and Narad she was simply putting the

different pieces in play knowing that, in the process of materialization and through the participants' deepening understanding, new ideas and solutions would be thrown up. But another clue to her intention may lie in what she expressed in December 1969 in response to difficulties in getting the designer and architect to collaborate over Matrimandir:

"I see very well the possibility of using the most contradictory elements AT THE SAME TIME (sic)...with a little skill, that's all. It's not exclusive, I don't say, 'Oh, no, not that!' No, no, no: everything, everything all together. That's what I want: to succeed in creating a place where opposites can unite."

Ideally, perhaps, the Matrimandir would have been constructed by yogis who already embodied integrality, the higher synthesis of opposites. However, in the absence of integral yogis Mother appeared to adopt another course, working with each individual's capacities to realize a different aspect of what she was manifesting at Matrimandir. Through Paulo, for example, she seemed to be expressing the inspiring ideal, through Roger the bold lines, through Piero the need for strength, stability and attention to detail.

The problem is that, lacking Mother's integral vision or specific guidance (as is the case with the Inner Chamber) we often snatch at one or other of her indications – often on the basis of our own predispositions – and elevate that to the status of 'Mother want-

ed...'. And thus, rather than being the "place where opposites can unite", we tend to turn Matrimandir into a polarizing lens which diffracts us into all the colours of the spectrum.

And yet the clues are before us, for Matrimandir – in spite of some of us making our best attempts to thwart it! – already provides us with a wonderful example of the synthesis of opposites in the way that the glittering outer skin of golden disks encloses a simple white inner chamber. For as we move backwards and forwards between richness of outer expression and simplicity of essence, the traditional polarities are transformed into a dance or continuum of complementary energies.

I have no idea how the present impasse regarding the status of the outer gardens/park will be resolved. As has happened before at Matrimandir, we appear to be confronted with mutually exclusive courses of action. Yet if we try to grasp the essence, the truth, of each perspective rather than simply its outward expression we may discover to our surprise that each, in some way, needs the other for its most complete expression. For doesn't revelation imply concealment? Doesn't expansion take its stand upon stillness?

And so begins our journey towards a higher synthesis. Or – who knows? – something else altogether...

Alan

CULTURE

Altérités: Bridging Continents



From left to right: the "algoja" played by Taga Ram Bheel, the "kamaicha" played by Hakim Khan, Yann Argenton on the guitar, Jean Marie Henry on percussion, Kutla Khan with the "dholak", Jhalal Khan with the harmonium, Xavier Martin on drums, Manuel Aguilar and Nishit Mehta on the piano.

It was a unique spectacle of musical and cultural fusion. Musicians from east and west, performing on traditional and modern instruments, met to explore new horizons.

All through the concert, I listened as if under a spell. Whether it was the powerful, moving voice of Jhalal Khan, Manuel Aguilar's passionate Spanish lyrics, the plaintive notes of the "kamaicha" (the oldest string and bow instrument known to man) played by Hakim Khan, the magical tunes of the "algoja" (a pair of flutes played simultaneously) by Taga Ram Bheel, the impressive solos on the "dholak" (a drum which originated in the Moghul courts) by Kutla Khan, the African and western percussion, played by Jean Marie Henry and Xavier Martin respectively, Yann Argenton's gentle strums on the guitar or Nishit Mehta's soothing notes on the piano...there was no doubt, this was truly music with a soul. The audience was carried by the music, the body felt compelled to sway to the captivating rhythms. The musicians, using their musical instruments and voices not only as mediums of expression but also as extensions of themselves, conversed, communicated, creating a rich dialogue. The magic and mystery of the orient met the passionate romanticism of the Mediterranean.

Manuel Aguilar, who founded MTDS (a French based association which organised the Alterités project) wrote the texts and composed the music for the concert, together with

Nishit Mehta, and twenty year old Yann Argenton, the youngest of the group.

In their own words: "Musicians of different and diverse musical origins and formations – including Rajasthani, Spanish, Jazz and Afro-Latin – have invented a new, poetic language, a poetic universe – a new continent where inner worlds can express themselves-free and equal."

They had met only six weeks before starting on their Indian tour and played together and experimented in the Rajasthan desert. They had then moved on to Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat, but were forced to leave due to the communal riots taking place there.

In these times when intolerance, violence and strife are rampant, not only in India, but the world over to witness, through music, the transcending of barriers, of differences of origins, ethnicity and religion brings much joy and hope...

Altérités was truly a unique and inspiring experience for the audience, as it must have been for the musicians themselves, who, it could be felt, intensely enjoyed every second of the performance.

At the end of the concert, the audience broke into an enthusiastic, well-deserved ovation, and shouted for more. Let us hope that Altérités will come again, to share with us another beautiful experience.

Emmanuelle

SPORTS

From Ball to Basket

For many children growing up in Auroville, "shooting basket" is a rite of passage. Hours spent watching various basketball games in play at New Creation sports ground or Certitude or even the small court in Aspiration, nurtures secret desires to somehow participate in the game later. Sometimes, even the sound of the ball bouncing on the court is enough.

Crossing all boundaries, more than 100 young and old, men and women and boys and girls from within Auroville and the surrounding villages regularly participate in the different basketball clubs here.

For 24 year old Martanda, who has been playing basketball since about the age of 11, childhood is full of happy memories "drooling on the side of the court" as he puts it, watching others play the game. An early start saw him joining the girls' volleyball team because there weren't enough players, but progression to the giddy heights of the men's basketball team was swift as he soon proved his ability on court.

23 year old Shanti would hear the rhythmic bounce of the ball on a nearby court from her home in Shakti – wondering what the sound was until one day she found herself somehow drawn closer. She would watch the game from a distance, unbeknown to the players until finally the call to join was too strong. Meeting the team they asked her if she would like to play with them. Four and a half years later she is one of their strongest players.

Sarasu, another basketball devotee, first started playing around age 16 (she is now 25), and hardly remembers how it all started, but confesses to feeling terrible if she goes for even one day without playing, it is now so much part of her life!

This year they all participated in a national level championship, together with Angelai, Palani and Ravi and they have recently returned from a 2-week basketball tournament in the Punjab. Belonging to the

Pondicherry Association of Basketball, every year, the Pondicherry State teams handpick 5 or 6 young hopefuls from the 9 existing groups of Auroville teams for these national events. Basketball is the only sport played in Auroville, where young people get an opportunity to travel out, experiencing some of the richness of the rest of India, and also to interact with others with a similar love for the game.

They all feel that there should be more interaction though – not just by playing in the various national and state level tournaments, of which there are many, but perhaps by integrating basketball playing with different school teams. Of course the need for good coaching remains.

National games are fiercely competitive with dedicated players under a lot of pressure to keep their winning images together. Whilst other teams are often stronger and faster, having undergone much more intensive training, Sarasu, Martanda and Shanti are nothing if not full of a sense of fun as they say this can take the pressure off, since you don't have to worry about winning. Laughing they respond "We just go and kick and bite them!" But on a more serious note, it is a good experience, travelling to new places and seeing new things – and they all just love watching others play – particularly some of the really top-notch players.

Basketball is communication – responding to other players and developing your own skills as well as being quite an intense activity – with lots of jumping, coordinating, running at high speeds and using your intuition. It also brings people together more and is an opportunity to develop many friendships as people play the game. Often sharing just a little bit of your life with somebody else in a way that creates something in common helps people to connect and understand each other better. Maybe everybody in Auroville should start to play?

Priya Mahtani

Meditation on the God dark and beautiful

He came down and touched the earth again,
the blue god in the golden body.

They have passed. The blue god and the golden god
have left their body and, once again,
are earth no more. Or earth for ever?

Pondering these secrets,
I wonder that still we can meet
Krishna in the gardens,
where he has always been.
That the magic is alive within,
the shy deer and soft-eyed cows, peacocks and koels,
flowers and garlands and perfumes and bangles,
and all the sweetness and softness
of children and lovers

which
our worlds are afraid to live.

The message still is the same:
Surrender. Thy will be done.
But knowledge thinks that it knows
and life claims a right to demand.
Only the heart, sometimes, understands
and gets quiet and soft
and finds peace in the arms
of the god dark and beautiful.

Lucas

Lucas - his intellectual and outer life is fairly well known, his efforts to integrate beauty and strength from inner resources are not often made public.

Through a dazzling, too luminous glass

To speak of Auroville somewhat alike is
of a stern Zen master the ultimate koan
attempting to answer: whatever one says
but thirty blows of his stick will earn.

Threadbare with misuse and worn out
from our mind banks words come in lots
by petrified, stultified automatisms plagued,
even in the midst of a sentence their intent
subtly changing into something else may turn
we never quite intended:
whenever not too sure what I mean
I just say it, and soon find out...

This girl Mahabalipuram has visited, Kanchipuram
and Chidambaram, tomorrow to Tiruvannamalai
intends to go, and what Auroville is all about
is now asking me...

Once used to reply that *a state of consciousness*
Auroville really is, not just a place
and of the Yoga, of Her Vision alone speak
but was scolded for it: merely *a state of consciousness*,
just about anyone and his uncle could all too easily claim
they got it as well, and where would we be then?
No, I was sternly told,
a definite *place* Auroville must be; but how to explain then
why his many facets of contradictions so full
hide more than reveal the Dream still?

Yes, this glass of water indeed is filtered....
"How come in such big, fancy colonialist places
many of you live, while in primitive, shabby *huts*
others dwell? It that truly *fair*?"
"Quite romantic them huts are, by many liked -
this is jaggary, "vellam" in Tamil called
unrefined sugar of vitamins full, for your tea..."
A bullock that has broken the rope
is all over the place running wild.
such fun have the workers trying to catch it.

"Do you meditate together?" Not very often. "Why not?"
The 4.30 bell rings. Workers begin to leave.
A cranky crow amongst a mango tree's foliage hidden
is screeching off like mad for no reason one can see.
"How does one become an Aurovilian?"

Three months a guest, nine a newcomer, then....
but some who so determined to settle here came
never made it, while others "just for a few days" here
in the end somehow never left
...on a crowbar someone has forgotten nearby
a snail is ever so slowly crawling up.

"How did you come here?" That's too long a story,
ultimately, because of Her...by Tamil standards
my visitor is showing far too much skin:
Perumal frowns passing by, Kumar has an eyefull.
The sunset is wonderful, low cumulus at the horizon
into soft gold hues gradually turning.

"How much did the Matrimandir cost?"
She leaves next morning, of what AV is really all about
uncertain still, just like me.

A legend is there of some crazy fish
who for but one thing searching
his whole life to spend choose, the sea
which never could he find it anywhere at all -
for the waves kept getting in the way -

- at times such a strange feeling
overwhelms me that much the same thing
somehow might I be doing - now you go
and *what is the sea*
ask the first fish you meet
- just go ahead and try...

One day some visitors gave me lift
back from Madras. As the sun was going down
into AV drove we, and as *through their own eyes*
at everything found myself looking:
where the side roads went no longer knew,
passing faces strangely familiar seemed
yet nameless remained; and when a huge sphere
began dominating the horizon
almost asked them, gee, what's *that*?
The very next instant everything right back
into the *known* precipitated, into recognition...
That to understand AV at all
ever since always have I felt
a similar I-less, blank look must reach
without any recognition from the past.

Vijay

Island

They came to live in his voice
- the plow and the book
and the airplane of man -
the dressing ways of women
and spring rain at sea.
Life's bondings with in war
as in love the gravity
of blood. All things - all works
made word - replaced his fall
into silence with a song
for hearts and minds as will
descry an untold beauty
among named multitudes
and dated progressions

His time made word took flight
arrowing past numbers
and the circumference
of the hour - time showing
overlapping shores to
what is born and dies alone.
Arising from a fount of
countless generations
to his pen came beauty
fearless and undying
in a pact between the One truth
and those of the manifold
- gold grain - spring rain - dresses -
then as now as tomorrow
in him to meet - without him

Lloyd

Earth's Asking

Soft underbelly of
Most upended soil
Just newly dug.

Earth

Inviting my hands
To sense its essence.
Empower her fruitfulness.

Priya Vincent

"Having given up on philosophy, left-wing terrorism, the flower children, drugs, most excesses and all hope by the age of 22, all that was left was to come here" says Vijay about himself.

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Subscription rates for 12 issues of AUROVILLE TODAY are the following: for India Rs. 250; for other countries Rs.1500, Can \$51, € 35, US \$38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail.
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Editorial team: Alan, Bindu, Carel, Roger, Tineke. Guest editors: Emmanuelle, Priya Mahtani. Proofreading: Navoditte. Calligraphy: Dharmesh. All photos, unless otherwise attributed, have been taken by the editors. DTP:

Matthia and Doris. 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>

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