

AUROVILLE TODAY

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*Auroville wants to be a
universal town where men
and women of all countries
are able to live in peace
and progressive harmony,
above all creeds, all politics
and all nationalities.*

*The purpose of Auroville
is to realise human unity.*

8-9-65.

The City of the Future

"Before modern man can gain control over the forces that now threaten his very existence, he must reassume possession of himself. This sets the chief mission for the city of the future: that of creating a visible regional and civic structure, designed to make man at home with his deeper self and his larger world attached to images of human nurture and love.

We must now conceive the city, accordingly, not primarily as a place of business or government, but as an essential organ for expression and actualizing the new human personality—that of the 'One World Man'....

The final mission of the city is to further man's conscious participation in the cosmic and historic process. Through its own complex and enduring structure, the city vastly augments man's ability to interpret these processes and take an active, formative part in them, so that every phase of the drama it stages shall have, to the highest degree possible, the illumination of consciousness, the stamp of purpose, the colour of love."

Lewis Mumford

When we read Mother's first public message on Auroville, the word "Universal" has the connotation of containing all that is, of extending to the whole world and its peoples. The concept of a universal town contains the seeds of an inclusive vision of the world embracing those tendencies that strive towards harmony and a new divine order of things. Human unity is not a given but has to be discovered, and harmony is a progressive unfolding of our aspiration for wholeness and universality.

One of the first designs of a town plan for Auroville combined elements of a mandala and the ideal radial city of the Renaissance. In the Renaissance view, man, the measure of all things, like the gods, remained bound by the limits of his own perfectability. The concept of perfection was a static one. A sense of transition and a transcendent dynamism was lacking. The galaxy town plan that was accepted by The Mother with its dynamic sweep of the spiral, contains the movement and energy of transition, transformation and transcendence that defines our earth and age. And the galaxy as a dynamic symbol invokes what it represents: the ever changing energy of an expanding universe. As above, so below; Auroville aspires to reflect and embody that universal urge. It is this evolutionary urge, of which our earth is the playing field and battleground, that more than anything else defines Auroville's universality.

"Truth is a totality, not an exclusion" and it is perhaps in this inclusive sense that Mother's vision of a universal town should be understood and lived and not reduced to a mere political ploy or a cliché.

Harmony as a reflection of universality is not necessarily defined as a mere absence of conflict and tension. It can also be understood in the more vigorous Heraclitean sense of a progressive balance born of the tension of opposites and the fire within. "What is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions like that of the bow and lyre." The conflict and tension between the different levels of our being, with the psychic being as orchestrator, is mirrored and multiplied a thousandfold in our collective arena. This tension of contraries creates energy; their balance, harmony. Harmony with the universal law of things and the dynamic urge of the Divine becoming. For what we experience today as conflict might tomorrow become a mighty "diapason of soul interchange." And it is this balancing of creative tension, this striving, this inclusive becoming, this aspiring towards an ever distant perfection—distant because still at best only imagined and partly embodied—that defines Auroville's attempt at universality and aligns it with the rhythm of the stars.

Roger

Birthday Week

There was a time when the 28th of February, Auroville's Birthday, was marked by just a bonfire at the Amphitheatre at dawn followed by hot chocolate and buns. This simple function has in recent years evolved into elaborate Birthday Week celebrations, commencing on February 21st, the Mother's birthday, and concluding on February 28th, Auroville's birthday. This year, the Birthday Week was stretched out even further: it began on February 19th with a two-day seminar on "The Quest for Unity", and ended on March 4th with a seminar on "Auroville as a Universal Town".

What was remarkable about this year's Birthday Week was that it bore the stamp of the Centre for International



photo: John Mandeen

Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) throughout, as nearly all of the organizers were associated with CIRHU. A billowing aquamarine tent, staked to a wisdom tree in the sandy field between Matrimandir and the Matrimandir Nursery and baptised the CIRHU tent, was the location for the seminars, forums and workshops offered during the week. Cultural activities took place in Pitanga or Bharat Nivas. Clearly, a lot of work had been done and the organizers deserve much praise for their efforts to make this year's Birthday Week a success.

But, though most of the cultural activities were well attended, the same cannot be said for the activities

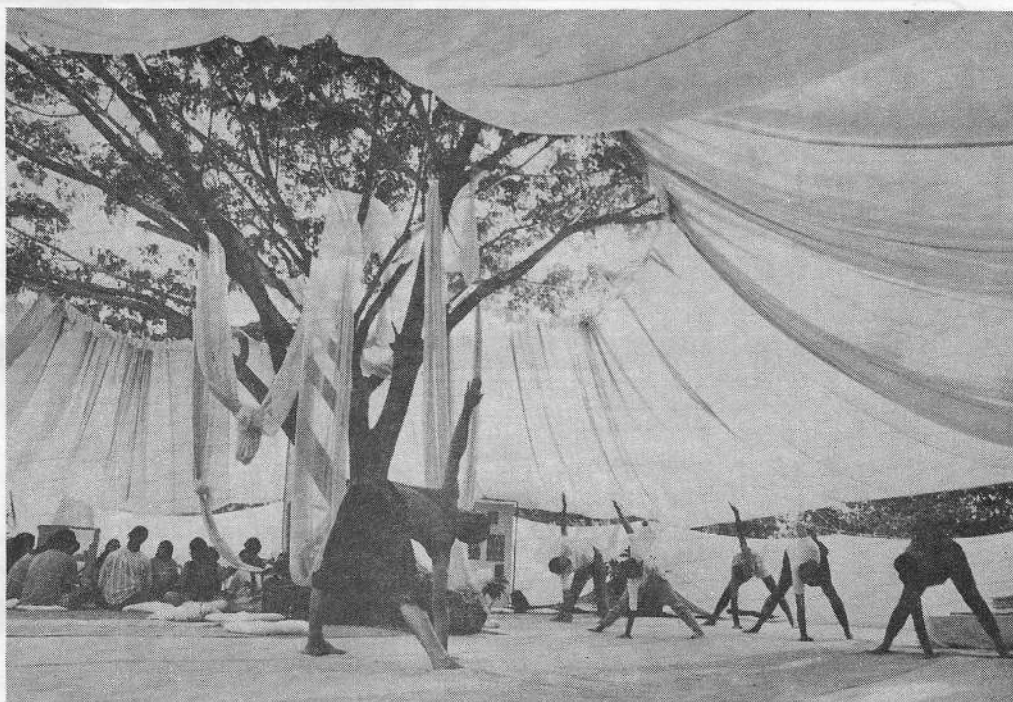


Photo: Ireno

organized in the CIRHU tent. The lack of community participation was noteworthy. Generally more guests than Aurovilians were present. Was this because there was some resentment towards the CIRHU project and a feeling that the Birthday Week should not have been mixed with it? Was the participation in the seminars and forums poor because Aurovilians were simply not interested in the topics? Or was it due to "meeting tiredness" and the fact that some Aurovilians are simply not motivated to hear again the (often too well-known) 'feelings' and 'opinions' of others to whom they do not actually relate? Or were Aurovilians simply too busy with their work, even on the birthdays?

These questions need to be answered, otherwise next year's Birthday Week could meet with the same fate and the efforts of many could go to waste again...□

Activities in the CIRHU tent

Seminars:

Two-day seminar on the Quest for Human Unity

One-day seminar on Auroville as a Universal Town

Forums:

On Matrimandir, "Our Uniting Centre" (+ guided exploration)

On the Green Belt and Bioregion; on the Cultural Zone (+ walk); on the Industrial Zone (+ walk); on the Residential Zone (+ walk); on the International Zone (+ walk); on CIRHU.

Workshops:

Body awareness: Aikido, Breathing, Hatha Yoga, Tai-Chi, Dance, Kalaripayat.

Arts: writing, art, painting, clay, music, dance, rhythm.

Towards a Universal City

Last year, in February 1994, participants of the UNESCO seminar at Auroville expressed the need for a universal city in the world. Inspired by the Mother's words describing Auroville as such, Dr. Ervin Laszlo, member of the International Advisory Council of Auroville and president of the Club of Budapest, promoted the idea of Auroville as a universal city. The concept of a universal city commands a high priority in the Club of Budapest, an international and autonomous body that aims at spreading awareness of global problems and human opportunities. This March, Auroville hosted an informal seminar on "Auroville as a universal city". Some highlights from the seminar:

About forty Aurovilians, guests and newcomers, gathered together in the CIRHU tent on the morning of 4th March to attend the seminar on "Auroville as a Universal City." While some came to share their views on the subject, most were content to listen and find out what the concept of "universality" and the proposal for declaring Auroville a universal city meant. The discussion opened with the question if Aurovilians were actually ready to become universal citizens. Roger Anger felt that Aurovilians should not demand the status of a universal city. He said, quite movingly, that "a universal town is something that one merits and not something that one demands. Auroville should not seek to be classified as a universal city but aspire to become a dynamic centre of universality."

Another key question posed at the seminar was, "Does it make a difference if Auroville is called a 'universal city' and not just an 'international city' as it is currently known?" There was unanimous agreement that the word "international" refers to a unity based on agreements between nations of the world while "universal" represented something deeper and more spiritual that was shared by all human beings regardless of their nationality. But it was left to Dr. Laszlo to describe in more concrete terms the difference between the two words. He said, "legally speaking, an international organization is created by a group of nations on the basis of mutual agreement. There is no actual unity in such organizations, for individual members hold on strongly to their national identities." Dr. Laszlo warned against the fallacy of asking for an international status for Auroville along these lines as that basically means that many nations would have a say in governing Auroville. He then expressed his hope that Auroville would go a step further and become a universal city: embracing the cultural diversity of its citizens and embodying a deeper spiritual

unity. Dr. Laszlo concluded his talk by saying that no other community in the world had made as much headway in achieving universality as Auroville and that, at present, only the Government of India would be ready to accept a universal city within its national boundaries. He wanted both India and Auroville to set examples for the rest of the world. For Dr. Laszlo, recognition of the universality of being and a living human unity were the only things that could save the world today. And thus he declared that this concept of being a universal city was important not just for the proposed 50,000 residents of Auroville but for the 5 billion members of the human race.

Later, Dr. Laszlo advised the setting up

of a working group which would work out a legal proposal for the Government of India, in order to declare Auroville a universal city. Such a proposal could include guarantees for more autonomy for Auroville and lay down a series of mutually beneficial provisions in matters such as security, village development, taxation, and economy.

The seminar concluded shortly after Dr. Laszlo's talk with the playing of a message of the Mother taped in 1954 on the event of Her applying for dual citizenship, and expressing the hope that the world would someday move beyond the need for nationality.

Bindu



The galaxy town model symbolizing universality

Auroville, Alive with Art!

Birthday Week was alive with sounds: the sweet, sublime violin and piano-recital of Holger and Carel; the technically perfect and touching synthesizer recitals by Heinrich; the soothing, space-transcending combination of Nadaka, Stefano and Himal; Claudio, a visitor from Barcelona, playing classical Spanish guitar and flamenco music that left us spellbound. The vibrant, vivid, intimate images of Auroville poets reciting poems at sunset, surrounded by candles and flowers.

The dancers, shedding the confines of stage: Devasmita interpreting the Upanishads; Shakila exploring Bharatnatyam; and Sonal Mansingh combining several Indian dance forms to tell the moving tale of Draupadi. The visual artists with their liquid, translucent colours: the mythopoetic paintings of Sapin; Mayaura challenging the surface; Elie's tapestries; Shanta's portraits; the Visitor's Centre turned into an art gallery, inside and outside with sculptures by Rolf and Stefano dotting the lawn.

Auroville, alive with art!

Om is all the Universe

Isha Vasyamidam Sarvam (Om is all the Universe): this was the dominant theme of the dance recital choreographed primarily by Devasmita, an active member of Auroville International France. To the accompaniment of a recording of Sanskrit hymns with simultaneous translation into English, Devasmita and her troupe illustrated some verses from the Upanishads. The movements and the fixed postures delightfully silhouetted against coloured light were based on the Odissi tradition. The dance also used screened paintings of Ashram artists as backdrops to great effect. Though some of the movements were slow and repetitive, all in all it was an innovative and noteworthy attempt to fuse music, poetry, art and dance.

Exploring Draupadi

Sonal Mansingh danced Draupadi to life. Alone on the Bharat Nivas stage except for two male mannequins whose presence suggested the unfeeling male authority, and accompanied by an exquisite light design, Sonal spun the tale of woman tested to the limit—withstanding humiliation, undaunted and unbowed, facing her fate, refusing to be a victim, courageous, passionate, enduring and triumphant.

For those not familiar with this passionate character from the Mahabharata, Draupadi's story is a journey from innocence to experience—bitter and profound in its implications for women today. From her birth in the fire to her unique friendship with Krishna, Draupadi's innocence and high-spirits are revealed. Then, after she garlands Arjuna and eagerly accompanies him home, her expectations as a shy bride are brutally shattered when Kunti, her mother-in-law, unknowingly orders her sons to share what they have brought home—not realizing that in this case it was Draupadi. As the mother's words cannot be retracted, Draupadi becomes the wife of all five Pandava brothers. Draupadi is in shock, her dilemma is horrible, but she faces it with dignity. Further humiliation occurs when the eldest of her husbands, Yudhishtira, stakes her in a game of dice and loses her. She is dragged into the royal court of Hastinapura, but the attempts to disrobe her in public fail as Krishna heeds her call and makes her sari endless, causing surprise and concern with those who commit the heinous act. She challenges the elders that Yudhishtira had no right to stake her as he had staked his own freedom and that of his brothers before and lost. The elders agree; she is granted a boon and request the freedom of her husbands. But Yudhishtira loses a second game of dice and is banned with his brothers and Draupadi to live in the forest for 13 years. There she meets Krishna and confronts him with her anger and her demand for justice: the cause of the great war of the Mahabharata.

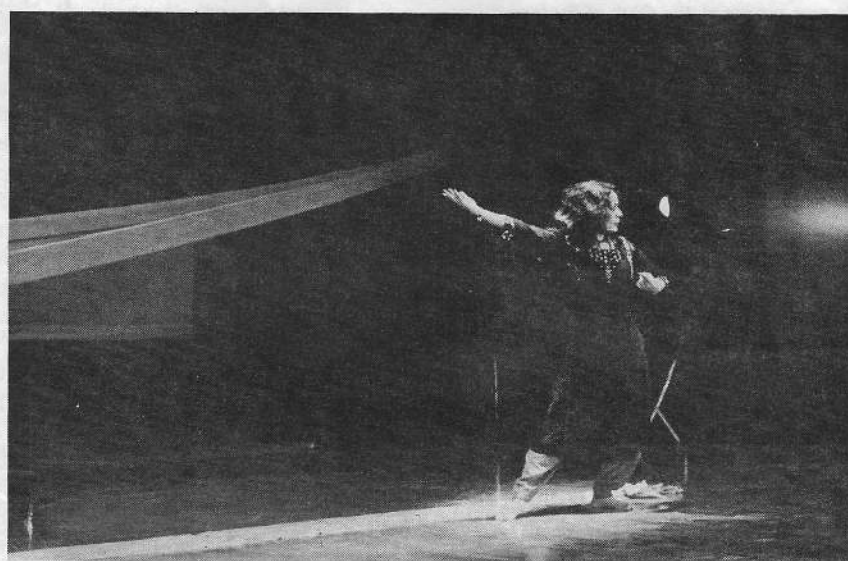
The gestures and movements used by Sonal Mansingh were a combination of Chau and Odissi traditions. Her innovative approach allowed her to mix Nritya (non-narrative dance), Nritya (expressional dance) and Natya (dramatic dance)—the three pillars of classical Indian dance.

In the lively discussion at Juanita's house which followed the dance performance next evening, Sonal Mansingh explained her fascination with the character of

Draupadi:

"Who is she? What was she like? I asked. And these questions set me in search of this living character—pulsating, vibrating. To connect with her is to be I touch with your inner self. Being a dancer and being a woman—it all came together. It was a fascinating journey to the roots, especially because Draupadi is a 'pucca no-no' (a real challenge). She is a strong woman, intellectually on a par with anybody, and these dimensions are not appreciated by men". As the conversation continued, other women in the group expressed their understanding. Very often a woman who is strong, who can argue back, who is the equal of any man is scorned. That is why Draupadi is not very popular, especially in India. At the same time, Sonal rejects the label of the militant feminist. "Draupadi's story is not just for women. Wherever there is oppression or humiliation, Draupadi is there. She is a role model."

Jill and Bindu



Dancer Sonal Mansingh rehearsing for "Draupadi"

Photo: John Manden

OUT OF DEEP MATTER

- Paintings by Mayaura -

"Sanskrit is the language of the gods", wrote Sri Aurobindo. Why does Sanskrit lettering appear spontaneously, naturally in Mayaura's work? Is it because she is studying this ancient language? Is it because of the shape of the characters themselves, or is it their spirit, their breath, the force of the words reborn on the tip of a brush? Does one sense here an incantation to the forces of the universe, to make them reveal something hidden in the depths of matter, some stirring, some rhythm unseen get perceived by our eyes?

The question must remain unanswered, silent voice, like all experience born spontaneously, naturally.

Forms and lines in many colours are superimposed and take us into another space, where matter and light are one, as if the one could not possibly exist without the other, as if in the depths of matter, which seems so dark, there is light, and our task, our inner work is to make it shine forth.

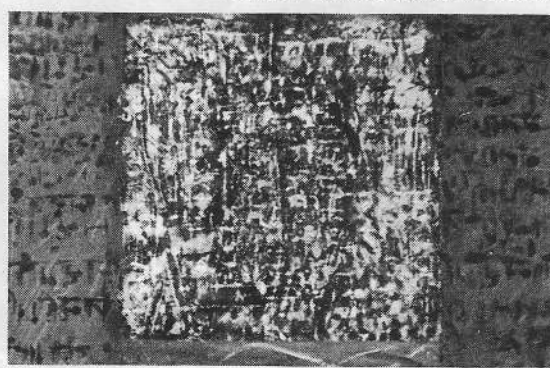
This is indeed the question, the task of our time, at the end of this millennium, when matter is still put down, exploited, shaped this way and that, as if it lacked all consciousness, inert and only good to serve the base desires of human beings.

Is perhaps the crisis through which we are passing a

revolt of matter against this treatment, refusing further to submit, and forcing us to look closer, to find another approach, with greater sensibilities, so as to finally discover the light, the sweetness, perhaps even the love which lies hidden in the depths of matter like a great secret.

This is what I experienced when I saw Mayaura's paintings, and when she spoke to me of her encounters with India, with Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and when she spoke of Auroville and the new life-force slowly expressing itself, and which perhaps holds the answer to the deadlock which we face in the West.

Paul Berdah (transl. from the French)



Detail from a painting by Mayaura

Seconds in suspense

"With the first beats of the fifth sonata of Beethoven, marvelous notes from the violin fall on the spellbound audience. Holger has such tenderesses...Carel, an attentive and intelligent ear, returns the response. And the whole piece, hammered, caressed, unfolds and then sinks...

Beethoven's tenth sonata was truly moving, even more so in the second movement, which attains peaks equal to his last quartets... a suspense one would have wished not to descend from.

Arvo Pärt's "Fratres" (brothers) was unexpected: breath taking sharpnesses left hanging; a frenzied rush of the bow over the strings, answered by a distant piano; abrupt pauses on a discord. A plaint perhaps? Yes, of course. A poignant lament vibrates from stretched metal, fades, is purified with the supplicating tones of an ever fainter voice, and dies away to two solemn chords from the piano... it takes eternal seconds before we can draw breath again, for this work has drawn us as tense as an archer's bow".

(From a review by Bernard Delambre, translated from the French)

Mesmerizing the synthesizer

"... Heinrich looked rather small and very lonely on the big stage of the Bharat Nivas auditorium, his right hand lightly lifted as if to mesmerize the keys of the synthesizer. Then, suddenly, the first chords of Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique broke through which shattered that image. The second movement of this sonata moved me with its certain tranquillity and radiant life. From the same composer we heard the Mondschein sonata, and after the break 14 Etudes by Chopin and a work by Scriabin."

(from a review by Bernard, transl. from the French)

CIRHU - the acronym stands for "Centre for International Research in Human Unity." This project, hailed by some as one of the most important projects of Auroville, has been intermittently proposed to the community for a number of years now. Last year, the proposal made some headway with the formation of the CIRHU group and with the active promotion of CIRHU by the international Club of Budapest as an important study-cum-consultation centre in its "planarization of consciousness" programme. The link is provided by Dr. Ervin Laszlo and Roger Anger who are both members of the Club of Budapest and are involved with Auroville on various levels. This year the "Birthday Week" was used as a means of raising interest in the CIRHU project, culminating with the laying of the CIRHU foundation stone on February 28, followed by an open forum on CIRHU the next day. What does the CIRHU project envisage?

CIRHU takes for its rationale that the world is confronted with an evolutionary crisis which can be successfully resolved only by a change of consciousness. To that end, CIRHU proposes "to be attentive to the process of research and experiences taking place in life in Auroville and everywhere else in the world in order to retranslate them on a new level that has as its fundamental objective: human unity" (from Auroville Development Scheme: 1988-1995). Other documents on CIRHU describe it as "as an international instrument, a cohesive force, between Auroville, India and the world". Following the lead of the Club of Budapest, it is proposed that CIRHU be organized around two main components that complement each other: one will be a "section for research and experimentation" which will be further subdivided into four research departments dealing with the physical, the vital, the mental and the psychic; the other will be a "section of analysis and action" that will study and propose solutions to the problems of the world. According to one proposal, the Club of Budapest would act as the main coordinating body of CIRHU in the international areas.

The proposed office space for CIRHU caters to the needs of a large international organization. It includes plans for "a conference room for 2500 people", "2 multi-purpose conference rooms of 300 seats", "a hotel for 100 people", "four laboratories", "a workshop room", "a library", "an exhibition space" and "a press centre". Half of these buildings, estimated at 1988 prices to cost Rs. 5 crores, are expected to be put up in the first phase of construction.

Many Aurovilians still have to be convinced about the need for CIRHU in its proposed form. They feel it is ridiculous to posit such grand and expensive building plans for a community that still lacks adequate housing and educational facilities and numbers merely around 1000.

A new Form for a new Force?

Expenditure on such a large scale could perhaps be justified if the need for the project was equally great. But this does not appear to be the case. The documents on CIRHU harp on the words "research" and "experimentation" in human unity without ever concretely defining what sort of experiments are going to be carried out. The dichotomy between "research" and "researchers", between "researchers" and "Aurovilians" made in these brochures also gives rise to the alarming suggestion among Aurovilians that CIRHU will only formulate and propound mental theories instead of actively participating in the Auroville experiment of realizing an actual human unity.

The Birthday Week did little to improve this image. For example, quite misleading was the statement made in the CIRHU Project Proposal for 1995: "CIRHU has already begun a program of experimentation and research in Human Unity with the program of February 18 to March 4, 1995 (the Birthday Week) in Auroville." To set the record right, the art workshops, seminars, forums and walks through the different zones of Auroville offered during the Birthday Week were neither announced as serious experiments in human unity, nor did they manifest themselves as such.

Some activities detailed in the CIRHU Project Proposal for 1995 have a more immediate importance. Though CIRHU's funding of the Internet connection will not foster an actual human unity, it will greatly enhance communication links between Auroville and the rest of the world. There is a need for greater documentation, centralization, and dissemination of the knowledge Auroville has acquired in the 25 years of its existence in the various fields—from wasteland regeneration to community development to small-scale enterprises, and it would be of immense help if CIRHU were to take up this work as proposed. The proposed coordination of a program in Auroville for the graduate students from the California Institute of Integral Studies could be desirable. But it must be borne in mind that all activities are already being carried out by various groups in Auroville with the help of the existing infrastructure. It remains to be seen if CIRHU will achieve anything more or different.

The discussion during the open forum on CIRHU, though short, was down-to-earth dealing with the practical problems of realizing human unity in Auroville. The participants at the forum unanimously agreed that it was the Matrimandir which was the centre and the living symbol of our unity; but it was felt that this unity should be expressed through daily acts of life. The need for trust, the ability to forgive and forget past differences between individuals so that the community as a whole could progress, were mentioned as important tasks that lay ahead of CIRHU. The participants felt that there should be a space which would allow people to meet and interact on a basis of trust and goodwill. The organizers agreed to put up a temporary, makeshift building on the CIRHU site for this purpose. This should be the approach taken. CIRHU could very well be "the new form needed to manifest a new force", but both the need for and the form of CIRHU should be allowed to evolve naturally within the context of Auroville.

Bindu



Express

It began as a need, some fifteen, twenty years back. The need to do something useful, practical and creative with one's hands. And the need of Aurovilians for essential tableware—cups, plates and bowls and the like. Over the years, under the guidance of Deborah and Ray of Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry, it perfected itself as a craft. Today, ceramics is a successful small-scale commercial enterprise in Auroville that has inspired the local people to take up this ancient craft. Profiled here are some Aurovilians who choose to work with or express themselves in clay:

Michel was busy "wedging" the clay when I arrived. Taking out from a polythene bag a generous lump of clay, cutting it neatly into two halves with a wire stretched taut, checking for air-bubbles and slamming the two halves on the table against each other, till all the air bubbles from the clay body was pressed out and it was ready to be thrown on the wheel. In the business for some fifteen years now, Michel is a successful craftsman who heads Flame, one of the biggest pottery-units in Auroville; an artist who makes beautiful vases, each one of them unique; and a conscientious worker who puts in a full-day's labour along with his workers. Equally fascinated with all the different aspects of pottery—the material, the shape, the glaze and the firing techniques—Michel says that for him, learning the craft of pottery has been "a slow and never-ending process of growth and manifestation" and that "it is this sense of progress" that he likes about his work.

Chinmayee was at the wheel, full of concentration, her hands slick with wet clay, containing and shaping the pot that she was making. It is this aspect of pottery, throwing a lump of clay on the wheel and watching it open and close, open and close, and grow into a bowl or a pot—the shape almost taking a life of its own—that fascinates her most. When she started out, (first, at the apprentice wheel in the Ashram School Pottery and later under the guidance of some older Auroville potters) she used to throw shapes at the wheel and then break them and start all over again. "Creating and destroying, it was such an inner process then," she reminisces. A young mother, Chinmayee works only half-a-day at the pottery in Dana. But she has recently launched her own unit, Mandala. She concentrates mainly on producing different shapes of tableware.

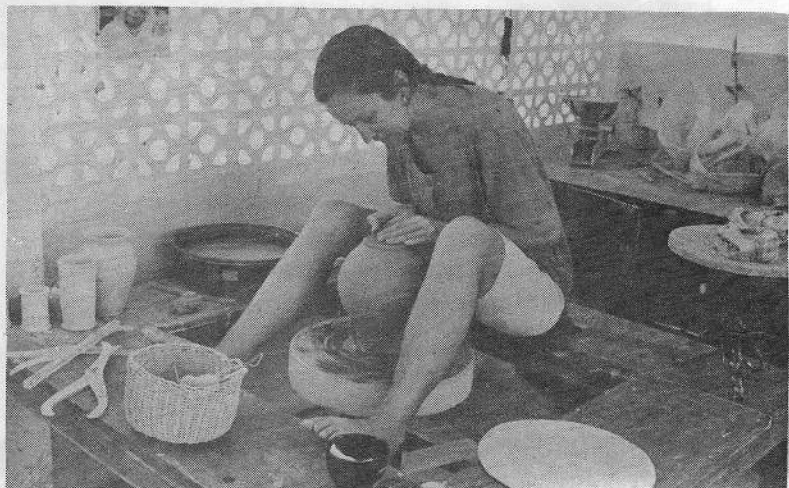
When I came across her, Anamika was applying melted wax onto the rims of upturned, unglazed saucers. Along with the other potters at Dana, Anamika was getting ready to do a final firing. And for her, that meant preparing about a 150 pieces—shaping them at the wheel, bisque-firing them to harden the clay-body, applying glaze (i.e., putting certain minerals

on the clay-body for making it both decorative and water proof) applying melted wax and then doing a final firing. "I am still very much an amateur at the craft and this is just one tiny but nevertheless an important detail of pottery," said she. "The wax prevents the glaze from running over and fusing the piece to the shelf of the kiln," she explains, showing me a pot where the glaze, due to improper waxing, had glued the lid on to the body of the container. For a beginner, the firing process, which takes 12-14 hours, can be a nerve-wracking procedure.

Especially in the wood-fired kilns of Auroville where temperatures are never fully under control. The pieces undergo complete transformation in the kiln. And when the kiln

is opened after firing, there can be quite a few surprises lying in wait for the potter—from beautiful, unimagined coloured pots to broken shards of clay! Anamika however has been lucky. She has not suffered any accidents in firing so far, but on the contrary has discovered, in the process of experimentation, beautiful new glazes.

Angad is an old hand at this craft. Like Michel, Angad has undergone various hardships and incarnations in the last fifteen years as a potter. Now his new unit, Mantra, not even a year old, is a successful commercial enterprise that sells its products in a number of cities in India. Angad attributes his success to his managerial ability, the skill of his workers and to the good working relationship based on mutual trust and goodwill that he has developed with them. However, he has not let his managerial instinct stifle his creativity. Angad still does most of the decorating work himself. Moreover, having trained workers allows him to devote time and energy to experiment with different techniques of decorating and glazing. He is the only potter in Auroville to develop and use the slip-trailing technique—a decorative technique in which coloured slip is trailed over leather-hard pots with a syringe, much like decorating a cake with icing. Angad plans to expand his pottery by setting up a new kiln to do salt-glazing. Salt-glazing is a special glazing process that requires throwing salt into the kiln during firing. Angad had pioneered



Concentration:
Chinmayee at the
wheel

ions



in Clay



the process in Auroville in the Eighties but no one has commercialized the process since then.

Lila's interest in beads brought her to ceramics. Her unit, Sunlit Lane, originally started out in 1987 by making jewellery out of beads handmade elsewhere in India. But

custom-made electric kiln that has the capacity of producing a hundred kilos of beads per month. In a few months, after standardizing the procedure, Lila will be set to market loose beads in USA.

Kratu is a painter turned sculptor who works with clay (see AVT No. 61) It can be

work. Maheswari was Egyptian in concept; some of the muses bore traces of ancient South American Art; the vase depicting a girl's head definitely had a Grecian touch to it; the "Head: out of the past" reminded one of the nobility of ancient Indian kings, while the roundish head, termed "An Indian Deity" had, for me at least, an African element to it.

Kratu attributes this quality of his work to the universalizing of art and culture that has occurred in contemporary times. Says he: "There has come about, in the present-day world, a universal culture: each country has contributed the essence of its culture, the height of its human achievements, to the formation of this universal culture. Contemporary art work reflects this universality of culture. I try to capture in my work an essential and basic human element that would be found in all races and cultures."

"Living in India, I am particularly susceptible to the Indian tradition in sculpture. I love the inner quality of Indian work. The best of Indian art and sculpture expresses an inner spiritual truth and this is what I try to depict in my work. I could merely copy the forms of Indian sculpture, churn out heads of the Buddha but it would not express the Indian spirit that I aim for. The form comes from outside and gets imprinted on the mind; the expression comes from deep within."

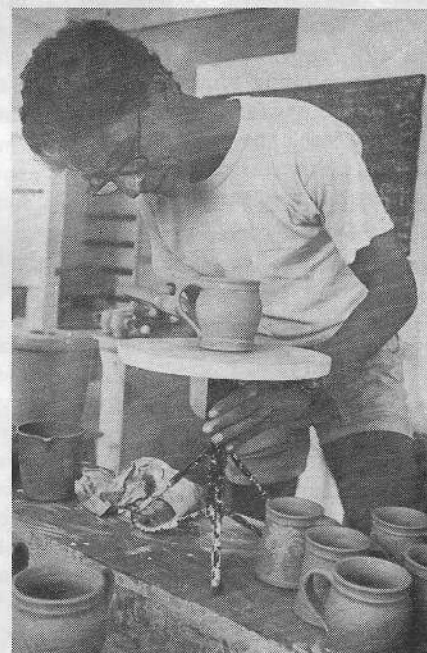
For Rolf, clay offers itself as a suitable medium for trials and experiments in sculpture due to its plasticity, Rolf works primarily in stone. But often, before he starts chipping, he expresses himself in clay. A clay model allows him to visualize his concept in a three-dimensional form and gives him a concrete idea about the proportions of the actual sculpture. This then helps him to choose the right piece of stone for the sculpture. Rolf also uses clay to explore abstract ideas. For instance, at the moment, he is interested in depicting "movement." To this end, he has executed in clay a series of three female figures: the first is a superbly proportioned statue of a standing woman with long hair and hands joined above her head in supplication; in the second, the rigid standing posture of

lines of movement. So far, Rolf has not been particular about firing his clay pieces as he sees them as experimental models but lately he has been thinking of building a small kiln to fire his models and make them more durable.

Sculpting with clay is an "inner process," "a way of yoga," for Helga. A kindergarten teacher by profession, Helga has, for the last five years, been spending her afternoons at Dana pottery, sculpting. "Clay is soft and patient and allows me to concentrate and quietly work out things within myself," says she. For her, the benefit that she derives from sculpting is purely personal and she is not compelled by material necessities or vital insistences to become a professional craftsman or an artist. In terms of quality, Helga feels that she lies somewhere between an amateur and a professional. Though her medium-sized, unglazed heads and figures sell quite well in the Boutique, Helga says that she is

not yet at that stage where she can consistently produce good work.

In her work, Helga concentrates almost solely on capturing certain expressions that she comes across in people or sees in pictures—expressions of nobility, strength, grace or purity. "It is easier, of course, to work from pictures. I often find myself studying people, the way they are built, but a given expression is so fleeting that I don't have time to absorb the details," says Helga.

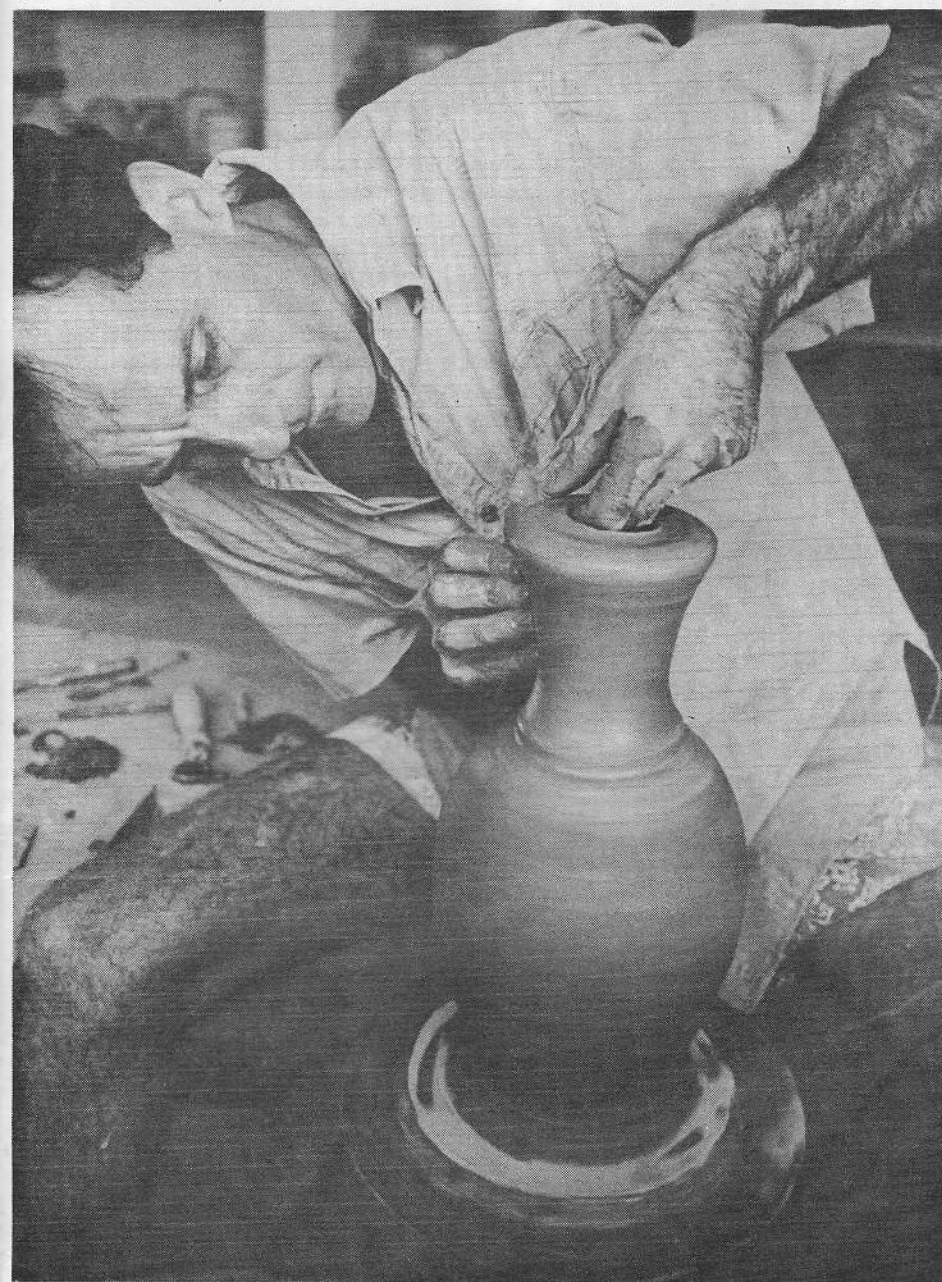


Angad decorating one of his pots

She shows me two recent sculptures that she has made from pictures of the Nuba tribe in Sudan. One is that of an adolescent girl, adorned just with some ornaments, who smiles sweetly, unhindered by her nudity. The other, titled "The Winner and the Loser", shows one strong young man, the winner, atop the shoulders of another equally strong man, the loser.

But both seem united in a spirit of brotherhood, the expressions on their faces convey that there is neither pride nor shame in winning or losing. "My work," Helga concludes, "gives me a lot of joy and sweetness and I wish to be a quiet and perfect instrument to express the sweetness that I see and feel."

Bindu



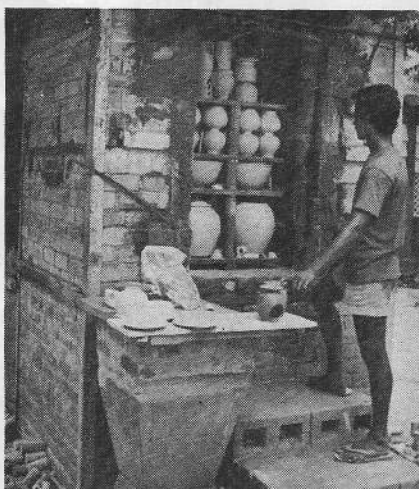
Michael "throwing" a vase

All photos: John Mandeem

then in order to have something more different, more creative, she decided to make her own beads. She experimented a lot in those early days, for instance, melting glass beads over clay instead of using a glaze and so on. A visiting potter from England, Patrick, introduced her to lustre-glazes (an expensive glaze where the chemicals used are oxides of precious metals). And Lila was fascinated with the colours and the sheen of lustre-glazes: "I would open the kiln and there would be all these beautiful shades of gold, iridescent blues and greens." The trouble lay in making the venture commercially successful. For it was hard to achieve uniformity working with metallic glazes and with the vagaries of a wood-fired kiln. Then last year, Lila had a lucky break: a lady from Guatemala, Dorothee, who had been making and marketing ceramic beads for thirty years taught Lila a special technique whereby she could achieve a metallic lustre without using a glaze. "This technique will make production cheaper, more uniform and easy," says Lila with relief. She has also acquired recently a

a difficult medium for sculpture: the piece has to have a homogeneous thickness; it has to contain the right quantity of grog (previously fired clay) so that it neither blows up in the kiln nor appears too grainy in texture. All little details that Kratu has painstakingly worked out over a period of fifteen years. But he likes clay. He likes the plasticity of the medium, the soft warmth of it and the ability to shape a sculpture with his hands.

I visited Kratu at the height of his exhibition in Auroville (see AVT No. 72). The display comprised a number of sculpted heads, figures, vases and friezes, the most popular of which were the series of the four Powers of the Mother and the set of muses. What struck me most was the varied expression of his



Stacking the kiln before firing

the human figure is lost as the play of movement begins—the hands twist apart and the falling hair merges with the curve of the leg; in the third, the human figure is completely subsumed by the flowing

Growing Food for the Township

AUROVILLE TODAY has repeatedly reported on the agricultural challenges that Auroville's farmers face (See AVT # 37, 40, 64). Lack of investment to upgrade farming facilities, lack of infrastructure such as proper storage space, lack of workers, skilled or otherwise, and above all, the continued apathy of most Aurovilians towards agriculture continue to make farming in Auroville an unnecessarily risky and overly uncoordinated adventure. Brooks Anderson, from USA, who spent eight months in Auroville working at Kottakarai farm and Annapurna and visiting other farming communities, recently wrote a letter to Auroville reminding us of the steps that we must take to make Auroville "a self-supporting township" in keeping with the original intention. While Anderson notes various alternative ways by which the township can feed its residents, he advocates a policy that would encourage greater food production within the community as a step and support for the other goals of Auroville. Here are excerpts from Anderson's letter:

Production of food in Auroville helps to feed Aurovilians while complementing Auroville's goal of creating a cashless economy. Food produced within Auroville, does not create a cash drain on the economy. Such food can be traded within the township for goods and services, and provides the raw material for food processing units, such as H.E.R.S. and Le Gourmet.

Secondly, so long as the fully mechanized, industrial model of agriculture is not embraced, food production within Auroville will provide employment for a large segment of Auroville's population. From my experience in Auroville, I know that Auroville's farms can keep many more people busy than the farms presently do. As Auroville's population increases, there may be many people who seek meaningful work, and agriculture could use many of them. The Entry Group could also help the labour situation in the farms by steering interested Newcomers who arrive in Auroville without specific jobs towards agriculture.

Thirdly, Auroville is not only a place for the production of food, but also for the production of knowledge and understanding. Food production can fit very well with Auroville's goal of being a place for unending education. In the process of growing food, Aurovilians can generate valuable knowledge and understanding. Much research has to be done in the areas of food production, preservation and processing.

"Disappeared knowledge"

Eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva, has written of the problem of "disappeared knowledge", referring to age-old knowledge about how to subsist and treat the earth that has been forgotten. Shiva contends that such knowledge from the past is probably essential for humans to live sustainably in the future. The diverse approaches that are being taken to agriculture in Auroville are ideal for the recovery of "disappeared" agricultural knowledge.

Fourthly, Auroville aspires to demonstrate ways of living that are suited to future exigencies, created by fossil fuel depletion, erosion of the soil genetic diversity, and population increase. Much of the attention and acclaim that Auroville has enjoyed is due to the tremendous effort that has gone into successfully regenerating the land, and demonstrating ecologically sound agricultural practices and principles. Increased emphasis on food production will keep outsiders coming to and interested in Auroville.

To increase awareness of Auroville's important role as one of the few places where the theories of sustainability are being applied, Auroville needs to devote more resources to the work of the

Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre (AGRC) and Village Action to document, analyze, extend, and publicize the lessons from the work of Aurovilians. A productive organic agricultural sector in Auroville will provide legitimate evidence of a much-needed, viable alternative to the catastrophic industrial approach to food production.

If Aurovilians choose to produce more food, they should carefully examine competing claims on land for experimentation, restoration and production (not to mention construction, recreation, education, conservation and industrialization). It is important to keep in mind that these uses need not compete. For example, Bernard, at Aurobrindavan, is

attracting the attention of people all over the world by his work in natural farming, which simultaneously generates understanding, heals the ecosystem, and yields food. At Annapurna, Tomas and Andre are experimenting with ways to improve the quality of their irrigation water in a production-oriented setting.

But satisfying the needs of the AGRC for agro-ecological experimentation and demonstration, of Pour Tous and H.E.R.S. (Health Education Research System), for food for processing and consumption, and of Auroville's farmers and greenworkers for fields and infrastructure, will require considerably more intentional integration, cooperation, and communication than presently takes place.

An alternative to integrated land use is the commonly taken reductionist approach, in which land is designated for single purposes, zones are established, and boundaries are demarcated (usually by irrational, market-driven mechanisms). Such an approach to research and land use is easier than integrated use, but generates understanding and knowledge that are applicable primarily to simplified, laboratory-like environments.

At the crossroads

There is enough land in Auroville to serve many interests, but the land is being used and developed too haphazardly. There needs to be more designation of the purposes for specific parcels by residents, or by some recognized and respected authority, so that land is not abused and so that past investments are not neglected, destroyed, or privatized. In particular, land that has been improved for agriculture needs to be preserved and protected so that Auroville can feed itself in the future.

If Auroville decides to produce more of its own food, something will have to be done to reduce the risks being borne by Auroville's farmers. A laissez-faire or free market approach to food production will not serve the public interest unless it includes a regenerated landscape and freedom from the ironic phenomenon of hunger despite bumper crops and food surpluses. Presently, many of Auroville's farms function because of the personal financial investment made by individual Aurovilians. Production is risky. If a crop doesn't yield or sell, the farmer takes a monetary loss. Auroville could encourage and increase production by identifying quantities of food that will be needed in community kitchens and by food processors, and then guaranteeing a fixed level of payment for such produce. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram has such an arrangement between its kitchens and farms, and it seems to work well. Again, such a policy will require more conscious coordination and cooperation.

Auroville has the knowledge, land, infrastructure, and inputs required to feed more people. Labour and determination to produce more food are the two ingredients that are needed to make this happen. Like much else in Auroville, agriculture is at a crossroads. Given the attention that it deserves, Auroville's agriculture is likely to go in a sustainable direction. If it is neglected, it will continue to be "a downhill business". Which direction it will go is up to all of us.

ARISE

AGRICULTURAL RENEWAL IN INDIA FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

At present in India, many agricultural practices are based on cash crops grown with heavy chemical inputs in the form of poisonous pesticides and fertilizers that lead to the degradation of the environment and the health of the people. Efforts are needed to reverse this process and to restore the traditional respect for the land and the organic practices that have been used for centuries with success. Auroville, from the beginning, has relied on organic farming practices, but as Brook Anderson's critique (see accompanying article) points out, there is a need for greater awareness among Aurovilians of the farming situation and for co-operation with other organic farmers in India.

Aurovilians first attended an Indian conference on organic farming in Warda, Gujarat, in 1980. Since then, attempts to organize, consolidate and promote sustainable agricultural practices throughout India have not done well in the face of government and other support for the "green revolution", involving use of non-sustainable practices to get quick results, increased yields, and higher profits. Some progress in creating awareness of sustainable agricultural practices was made in the National Seminar on Natural Farming in 1991 and at the Sustainable Agriculture for the Environment Conference in 1993. Then last year, two Aurovilians went to Gujarat to help plan a new conference with assistance from representatives of the International Federation of the Organic Agricultural Movement and Bread for the World who have an Eco-Centre in an industrial estate in Gujarat.

The contrasts in Gujarat extend full spectrum from industrialized Vapi, the most polluted city in the world, to a model organic farm set up by Bhasker Save. Save was once a fertilizer salesman, but when he saw the disaster of that approach, he became an organic farmer. He has developed an incredibly productive farming system that is not only organic but moves towards the minimum input approach, sometimes called natural farming. This approach takes full advantage of techniques such as companion planting, inter-cropping, bio-

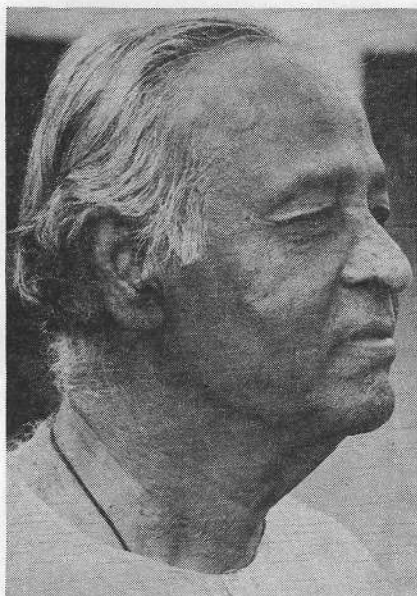
pest control, worms, herbs, canopy levels, and watering beyond the drip line. An Auroville farmer rightly called Save's farm "an edible forest".

Another agricultural discovery made in Gujarat was at the seaside home of a former socialist finance minister. He had successfully experimented with an elusive formula that others have been researching for decades. About fifty years ago an eccentric American inventor had worked in the arid regions of the American Southwest on a soil regenerator and plant nutrient formula based on cow dung, sea water, and yeast. The idea is to incubate billions of microorganisms that "eat" the acidity, alkalinity, or other conditions of the soil, making themselves "digestible" for the plants and creating a living soil. Several products are now on the market based on this research. The ex-finance minister had doubled the yield of coconuts in test plots where he had applied the "formula".

Before leaving the industrial estates and farms of Gujarat, the Aurovilians met a microbiologist with his own "factory" full of neem leaves, seaweed, and assorted plant material to "manufacture" organic pesticides, plant growth stimulants and natural fertilizers.

The Gujarat trip resulted in more links to organic farmers in India. And at their behest, Auroville will host an "All-India" seminar on organic farming at the end of April 95. This seminar, termed ARISE (Agricultural Renewal in India for a Sustainable Environment), plans to come up with a more organized approach towards creating a healthy edible future. Vandana Shiva, author of *Monocultures of the Mind* and international figure in the work for a sustainable future for the earth, will attend, and has arranged for some special guests: one is a French scientist who has researched and documented the advantages of organic farming over current conventional practices; the other is a Spanish organizer of small farmer cooperatives. About one hundred participants from India are expected to attend.

BII



Prof. V. Madhusudan Reddy

Formerly senior Professor of Philosophy, Osmania University, Hyderabad. Chairman of the Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad—an advanced center of Integral and Future studies, piloting a project called Aurodarshan in Hyderabad, named by The Mother as "The University of Tomorrow". Emeritus Fellow of the University Grants Commission in India. Unesco Fellow (1961). Fulbright Asian Professor (1969). Author of 27 books. New Member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

"I will come to Auroville again and again"

Introducing Professor Madhusudan Reddy

"I will come to Auroville again and again. Not because I am a member of the Governing Board—please forget about that! I only learned from the newspapers about my appointment, and four days later from New Delhi—but because Auroville is my place ever since it started. At that time I wrote to The Mother, who had given me much work in Hyderabad, if I could be an Aurovilian while still doing the work in Hyderabad. Mother said "No", and that to be an Aurovilian, one has to live in Auroville. Ever since I have been carrying Auroville in my heart."

March 12th, 1995. Invited by the Savitri study circle, Professor Madhusudan Reddy, a recently appointed member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, gave a brief talk on sadhana, human unity and the role of Auroville. Some excerpts:

"What is the human individual in relation to this wonderful universe? Nothing but a formulation, coarse and crude, of certain cosmic forces. The body, the emotions, the mind, are each small formulations of universal matter, universal life and universal mind. Unity was always there, the human race was always one family. But with the advent of mind we became divided. The mind seeks unity but by its very working separates us, divides. It is therefore necessary to transcend mind, not to abolish it but to go beyond. This is the privilege of the human seeker. It is only when the human individual awakens to the true truth of himself that life in the world becomes relevant. This awakening is what is called sadhana—a conscious transcendence of the ego at all levels, physical, emotional, and mental. The awakened individual becomes a

seeker, realizing that his doors of perception had hitherto only been opened outwards, and that he does not know his inner truth.

To me, sadhana is very simple. It is to remember The Divine as sincerely, as simply as possible, and to do the work that has been given with consecration. Work done without consecration becomes ordinary labour. But work done as a conscious offering is bound to unite us once again with the Divine consciousness. Be simple, never put on airs. Do not think of yourself, of your own progress or of becoming a superman; that is the worst thing to do. Think only of the Divine. Only when you forget yourself totally and surrender, the Divine starts preparing you, and to the extent you are prepared, the Divine gives. What more *moksha* do you need when you love and serve the Divine? Remember Her with gratitude. This is my sadhana.

You Aurovilians are fellow travellers of the Infinite, seekers of the Eternal. There is here a confluence of seeker souls from all over the world. To live in Auroville is a great opportunity granted by the Divine himself. For there is a great significance to Auroville. It is

destined to help humanity to realize unity, helping it to go beyond mind into a New Consciousness, so as to realize again that all of us are one and have always been one. That Auroville belongs to nobody in particular does not mean chaos or lawlessness; it means transcendence of the barriers that have been set up by ordinary human beings. Auroville harbors all kinds of people, a sample of the entire creation. Many problems will be there, but never place any accent on them. We are moving in the direction of the Divine, guided and helped by Him. There is no reason why we should not succeed. It is ordained by the Divine that once again we will be united with him in his consciousness. In spite of us all, in spite of all our human weaknesses, Auroville will lead humanity towards a greater unity, the essential and true unity. I expect that manifestation to take place in the next millennium, which will be The Mother's Millennium of Manifestation."

In the questions and answer session that followed his talk, Professor Reddy declined to comment on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. "It was my ego problem which caused me to write all my books. Though it helped me to understand Sri Aurobindo a little better, I cannot say that I understand *Savitri*. No one can understand *Savitri*, except Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. What I can say is that *Savitri* encompasses the many highways between the human and the Divine which Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have been creating so that all of their children could move and realize the deathless state of their own existence." In reply to a question about the relevance of the Vedas for present day humanity, Professor Reddy spoke about his own magnum opus, the trilogy *The Vedic Epiphany*.

"What was envisaged and announced by the Vedic Rishis has been fulfilled in Sri Aurobindo. The highest state that the Rishis could envisage was called by them *satyam, ritam, bhrat*, the Kingdom of Truth, the Right and the Vast, the world of Immortality which hardly anyone could realize. But the Rishis never thought of bringing this world upon earth.

Sri Aurobindo has discovered the instrument, the supramental, to bring this Truth-Consciousness down. The entire story of human evolution starts with the Vedas and finds its apex and fulfilment in Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*. The Supramental has become a fulfilled reality not only for one individual but for the entire earth nature. The first part of the trilogy subtitled "The Vedic Vision" deals with the entire vision of the Vedas. The second part, 'The Vedic Action', is all about the work of the Gods, Goddesses and Asuras. The third part, 'The Vedic Fulfillment', deals with the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother for the earth; and will be published soon."

Carel

Women's day celebrated

"336 women from 13 villages in their best sarees, flowers in hair ... no husbands, no children - a free day to enjoy ..." begins a report in the *Auroville News* about Women's Day celebrations in Auroville held for women's clubs from villages all around. A fun-fair and cultural events were offered, while women's issues such as the exclusion of widows in village society and the necessity for education and equality of women and young girls were presented through talks and humorous sketches.

Illuminating The Chamber

Auroville received a special gift shortly before The Mother's birthday this year: two lenses. One is necessary to ensure a constant ray of light onto the crystal globe in the Inner Chamber, and will be used in conjunction with the heliostat on top of Matrimandir. The second lens will be placed underneath the crystal, below the floor of the Inner Chamber; it will create a sun-spot of about 35 cm in the lotus pond beneath Matrimandir. To protect the heliostat and the first lens from the elements, a small dome will probably be constructed on top of the Matrimandir.

Technical information:

Focal length, first lens: 30 m, diam. 45 cm
Focal length, second lens: 5 m, diam. 25 cm
Diameter of sun-spot on the crystal globe: 360 mm
The lenses are made out of the same type of glass used for the crystal (Bohr Kron 7) and were manufactured by General Optics Asia Ltd., Pondicherry.

The Auroville net grows

A new digital telephone exchange for Auroville was inaugurated on 30th March. Apart from improved billing and security features, the new exchange has allowed 200 new lines to be laid throughout Auroville. This has entailed, among other things, the digging of 20 kilometres of ditches for laying the underground cables.

Memories of life with Mother

Nirodbaran came to Auroville on February 26th to share moving memories of his life with the Mother (see right photo). "This will be my last talk in Auroville", said Nirodbaran, citing his age—he was born in 1903—and health problems. The Savitri Study Group, nonetheless, hopes that Nirodbaran will come once more to Auroville to speak about his work as amanuensis for Sri Aurobindo, when he was composing his epic poem *Savitri*.

Savitri Study Circle

The Savitri Study Circle, started largely at the initiative of the Secretary, Dr. De, was inaugurated last year on 24 November, Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day. This group of about 25-30 people meets every Sunday morning in the Bharat Nivas complex, for an in-depth study of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, often complemented by relevant references to the Mother's Agenda and sacred texts or philosophical systems. Recently, the Study Circle has hosted some eminent speakers, Shradhdhalu Ranade, Prof. M. V. Nadkarni and Prof. Madhusudan Reddy. While Prof. Reddy's talk was more general (see above), Shradhdhalu gave a detailed exposition of the first canto of *Savitri*, concentrating on particular lines and the multi-levelled meanings contained in each of those lines. Prof. Nadkarni drew a very interesting comparison between *Savitri* and Auroville: "Mother once said that Auroville wants to be a new creation expressing a new consciousness in a new way according to new methods, and that Auroville offers itself to all those who aspire to live the truth of tomorrow. If you replace in these lines the word 'Auroville' by 'Savitri', you get a correct picture of the importance of Sri Aurobindo's epic. It is more than just philosophy, more than just poetry, it is a kind of magic key through which one can gradually get closer to Sri Aurobindo's own consciousness."



Photo: Ireno

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IN THIS ISSUE:
UNIVERSAL CITY; BIRTHDAY WEEK; EXPRESSIONS IN CLAY;
AGRICULTURE; BOOK REVIEW; ETC.



PHOTO: SVEN

Sonal Mansingh as Draupadi (see inside)

BOOK REVIEW

THE DAWNING OF AUROVILLE

W.M Sullivan

Auroville Press, 1994

333 pp., illustrated, paperback

So much of the literature that comes out of Auroville ranges from the hilariously romantic to the naively—often misleadingly—idealistic. The problem with this stuff isn't the noble sentiments which, though sappy and cliched, are nonetheless noble. The problem—as it seems to me, sitting in college half-way across the world, and trying to hold onto a part of my home while knee-deep in an academic swamp—the problem with most of the books and publications, is that they are hopelessly removed from the everyday realities of Auroville. As an expression of “inner states”—that local terminology seems to encompass dreams, spirituality, and emotions—Auroville-related writing does fine, but as a representational effort, it mostly falls spectacularly, and frustratingly, short.

Amidst these shelves of dream/feeling literature, Bill Sullivan's recently published *The Dawning of Auroville* is a welcome breather. Bill's strategy is pleasantly self-effacing. The story of Auroville, as it is told in his book, is not narrated in the author's voice, but rather through an impressively voluminous collage of archival records gathered from the very birth of Auroville right up to the enactment of the Auroville Foundation. Excluding the Foreword and Afterword, the book is divided into twenty-one sections, each of which tries to capture an aspect of the Auroville story.

The result is surprisingly multi-dimensional: section after section, the Auroville that I know—the complex, organic community, both divine and human, both beautiful and ugly—unfolds in a series of candid snapshots taken from various sources. The book succeeds in capturing what, together and only together, add up to the Auroville experience. From the concrete reality of “Earth” (the section on Auroville's reforestation efforts); to the idealism of “A Dream”, to the ugliness of “The Battle” (on the struggle with the SAS); to the inspiration of “The Play's the Thing” (Auroville art)—both unabashed idealism and harsh, often skeptical, pragmatism are given voice.

Ultimately, it is this search for inclusiveness, for representational authenticity, that gives the book its true value. For many of us, Bill's endeavour is a familiar one—explaining Auroville. “How communicable is the experience?” he asks in the Foreword. “For years I was convinced of the impossibility of writing a book which would give much insight into the real Auroville story”. As someone who has repeatedly had to face the barrage of questions—“Where do you come from? Where in India? What's it like? Is it like a commune?”—that is so much a part of social interaction in the real world, Bill's initial hesitation is painfully reminiscent of my own silences and attempts to change the topic of conversation. I know where I come from. But I never know how to tell where I come from. And the results, as I have grown to learn, is that you form friendships and intimate relationships with people who never really know you because they do not—and, apparently, cannot—know your roots.

Often, telling is even more painful than

THE DAWNING OF AUROVILLE



not telling. The problem with Auroville is its complexity; this place is so many things at once. As one voice in the book laments: “Auroville is an anthropologist's nightmare.” Telling only one side leaves a feeling of incompleteness and dishonesty. I don't want to present my home as a paradise on earth, and yet I need to get across the truth that, at the underlying level of hopes and aspirations, Auroville is indeed a potential paradise. Yet the latter truth seems so incommunicable, and trying to share it only exposes it to distortion. So many times, I have watched my friends warp my home beyond recognition by applying their well-defined (and totally inappropriate) categories: new-age paradise, last remnant of communism, Indian Kibbutz, new religion. Usually, I give up, and close the topic with an exasperated, “You don't understand.”

Of course no book can substitute for actual experience, and no book is going to make anyone really understand. Even in Bill's collage, there is room for more. The education section, for example, does not quite capture the schools as I know them, and it virtually ignores the present crisis in Last School. Similarly, the portrait Bill paints feels incomplete without more on the sports scene. But these are aspects that appeal to me because they form the core of my subjective experience. And everybody, I suppose, is going to feel that the book is lacking in the area of Auroville he or she knows best.

Even that sense of having only half-captured the reality of Auroville, however, is a tribute to the book's representational effort: there is a little of everything, enough to give the reader a genuine taste of this place. Bill's book is what I would call a primer on Auroville. By no means does it tell the full story, but it goes a long way towards answering the plea he quotes from an old issue of the Auroville Notes: “We are continually asked from outside for more information about Auroville. This is a problem which has never been solved satisfactorily. Still, there is a need.” Now, for the first time, I have some suggested reading to offer the next person who asks me what Auroville is like.

Akash Kapur

Akash Kapur is a graduate of Auroville's Last School and presently in his second year of studies at Harvard University (USA).

Copies of the book are available from Auroville Communication Centre, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. The book costs Rs. 230 (plus Rs. 20 for mailing) in India and US \$8 (plus \$3 for airmail postage) for elsewhere in the world. Cheques are to be made out to Auroville Fund specified “Dawning of Auroville”.