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# Auroville

## TODAY

Since 1988

Discovering the Dream

February 2000, no.133

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## Going out, coming back

### Jesse and Angiras reflect on AV 2000 and life outside

Angiras and Jesse were not only our guest editors for this issue; they were also much involved in the AV 2000 festival. Here they look back on the event. They also consider how, for a young person, life inside Auroville differs from life outside, and why it is important to experience that larger world.



AV 2000 gathering

*Auroville Today: Did the Auroville 2000 gathering fulfil your expectations?*

**Angiras:** When we first thought of the AV 2000 festival we were full of ideas and plans. We wanted the whole of Auroville to be involved, not just the youth, and we wanted to set up an Art Village in the Youth Centre and to make it the focal point of all the activities. However, the reality is always different from the plans, particularly when other people organise it. The venue was shifted to the Visitors Centre and the all-Auroville aspect seems to have got lost, to the extent that even the Auroville youth felt left out and became resentful. They didn't attend any of the events, and it took some time to establish communication with them.

Despite this, overall AV 2000 was a success. What I did appreciate was meeting so many people who had been away and not been back in years, and the way that, on a personal

level, old barriers got broken down.

**Jesse:** I knew that the reality would be different from the planning because the success of any event always depends upon who turns up with the energy to make it happen. But for me there were great moments of collective creative activity—like the painting of the mural on the Post Office wall when the Kuilapalayam kids also got involved.

**AVT:** Many of the people who have returned or are revisiting are happy to be back, but they have also obviously gained something important from being outside. Is this your experience?

**Angiras:** Definitely. I always knew I would come back, that Auroville is where I want to contribute all of myself. But I had to leave Auroville to grow up—I wouldn't have been

## Youth

**A**V 2000, held at the turn of the millennium, was a celebration of Auroville youth, many of whom returned to Auroville especially for the occasion. We were very happy that two of the returnees joined us as guest editors to cover the occasion. ANGIRAS and JESSE not only dramatically reduced the average age of the Auroville Today team; they also brought in fresh energy and insights.

This issue deals with youth in a variety of ways. In addition to reports and interviews centring around AV 2000, we feature the youngest member of the Working Committee, we review a multi-media happening put on by the Auroville Youth Atelier, and another young Aurovilian describes his visit to a community in Scotland. We also explore some of the problems encountered by Auroville youth as seen through the eyes of an experienced youth counsellor.

"Youth is an art", wrote Oscar Wilde. Here are some of the artists... Eds.



Our guest editors

able to do that here because, when you've been born here, you're always a child in the eyes of the adults. And there's this atmosphere... before I left I was terrified to say anything because I was afraid it would be held against me. It made me very introverted. It took me a long, long time to open up in the West and start talking to people. Now I feel competent to participate in life here because outside I developed a greater confidence in myself.

**Jesse:** Everybody makes mistakes—it's part of the process of learning, growing up—but in Auroville if you make one big blunder in the public eye you're labelled by that blunder. We don't allow each other to change, to make mistakes. When I left Auroville I felt an absolute dope: nobody liked or respected me. I had to leave to get rid of that perception of myself, to live somewhere where I could make mistakes without there being any big deal. In a large society like Australia that's possible, and now I feel I can return to Auroville with a clean slate and a much clearer sense of what I can contribute.

### Different challenges

**Angiras:** The challenges you experience inside and outside Auroville are different. Outside it is more about survival—how to pay the rent or buy food. Inside Auroville the problems are much

more to do with people and social pressures.

**Jesse:** My experience of Auroville is that every interaction is very intense and has to be managed carefully: I feel everything we say or do ripples through the community and returns to affect us. It's hard to live outside but, in the long-term, I think it's harder to live in Auroville. Because here the lights and distractions fall away and you're left looking at yourself. There's no escape: you have to discover your inner self. This is the magic of Auroville, but it's also tough, particularly in the early stages.

**AVT:** Did you ever sense, during the recent youth gathering, that the young people want to return to clean up what they feel is wrong with the community?

**Angiras:** There are plenty of things happening here that make my blood boil, but a youth revolution would only work if enough of us came back at the same time to do something about it. If you come back on your own, you soon get caught up in what's happening. It's a nice idea, a youth revolution, but I don't think it will happen like that...

**Jesse:** I did meet a few people at AV 2000 who  
(continued on page 5, col.4)

## Nature's vibrations

The Mother has named flowers according to their spiritual significance. A new book is coming out.

**"I**t's largely the fragrances that have made me give flowers their significance. Once, without telling me anything, someone brought me a sprig of *tulsi* (basil). I smelled it and said, 'Oh, Devotion!' It was absolutely a vibration of devotion. Afterwards, I was told it's the plant of devotion to Krishna, consecrated to Krishna. Another time, I was brought one of those big flowers (which are not really flowers) somewhat resembling corn, with long, very strongly scented stalks. I smelled it and said, 'Ascetic Purity!' Just like that, from the odour alone. I was later told it

was Shiva's flower when he was doing his tapasya. I find this very interesting, for we didn't decide it should be like this: these are conscious vibrations in Nature. The fragrance, the colour, the shape, are simply the spontaneous expressions of a true movement." (*Mother to Satprem, in Mother's Agenda Vol 2, February 4, 1961*)

A new book containing The Mother's significances for almost 900 flowers will soon be released. A preview based on a talk with the book's editor, Lilo Burke, can be found on page 8.

## Millennium Festival

A multi-media performance and other events

**T**he Art Youth Atelier (AYA) is a group of dynamic young Aurovilians who are, as they put it, "really turned on by the Arts". During the AV 2000 festival they put on a multi-media performance which impressed many. Here is the background to it, as described by Gemma, one of the AYA members:

"The story with the script slowly came along while working on it. Milene and Andre helped us put the script together, and Gioia worked with us on stage expression. Marie gave the girls, Fanny, Marjorie and Bettina, a hand with sewing the costumes. Many times we had difficulties to accept all the ideas that came up. We had to face

collective problems like different opinions, self-organization, communication and accounting. Once we had to shift the date because of rain, and we never got the chance to have a general rehearsal with all the lights and costumes. So the night we performed was actually the general rehearsal. A few things didn't work out while acting, so we had to improvise to a certain extent. But after all we had a really good experience which brought us closer together. We want to continue working together. This was really the beginning of the AYA for us."

For reviews of *The Liquidator Arts Club* and *Partha's play*, see cultural events on page 7.

### Matrimandir



Beauty of marble inlays exposed

see page 2

### Architecture



Visiting architect Eric Locicero looks at AV architecture

see page 2

### Annapurna



An update on Auroville's biggest farm

see page 3

### Parisian Nightmare



Emilie searches for a lost Paris

see page 7



# Where are the middle spaces?

## A visiting architect looks at Auroville

Eric Locicero is a prize-winning French architect. He used to have his own radio programme in France, which brought together architects and others to discuss cultural issues, and at present he teaches architecture at the University of Paris. Recently he visited Auroville for the first time. We asked him to share some of his perceptions.

**I** find many similarities between the architectural movements of the past thirty years in Europe and the different styles of architecture that have developed here. For example, the early constructions designed by Roger Anger are characteristic of the end of the modernist movement. They are very expressive but don't really take the landscape into account (photo above). I also find here echoes of an Italian post-modern period (photo below), and a more recent phase in which there is an attempt to integrate architecture more into the natural surroundings—which is exactly what European architects are working on at present.

This latter trend is clearest in some of the more recent individual houses in Auroville. In one way they are less expressive than the earlier style of architecture in Auroville—these houses are more minimalist, less burdened with the architect's ego—but I think they are more successful. For example, they often use natural materials that look and last well, in contrast to concrete which was used in some of the early constructions. There's a danger, however, in becoming too passive, in allowing nature to dictate everything. For there has also to be something visionary. I feel that many of the buildings of the past ten years or so I have seen here lack this vision: they are not really exciting or experimental, and something has to be rediscovered.

In Auroville there is

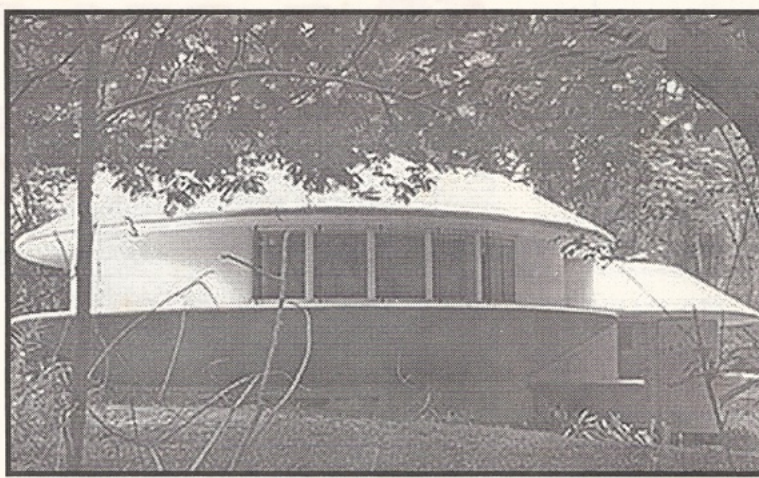
**"Italian post-modern" guest-house at Felicity**



not much public architecture. What there is—with the exception of Matrimandir, which is truly unique—is not very special: it's like public architecture elsewhere in the world. It doesn't express the utopian vision of Auroville.

In fact, what is really missing in Auroville at present is 'middle space': something between big public constructions and private houses. I'm thinking of the small neighbourhood shops, community spaces, which for me make a city come alive. I hear a plaza is being planned. Perhaps this will begin a new movement.

The other big question is how to organize, to plan the city. At present most of the constructions in Auroville are private houses which have individual styles. This gives a rather fragmented feeling to the whole. What is needed is to lay down some main lines, something which unifies the different parts. This doesn't mean that there can't be evolution, that other layers of complexity can't develop. But, as in music, you need a structure within which to improvise. This structure could be something drawn from the original Galaxy



**"Modernist": CRCP building at Fraternity**

Plan, or it could be something using the landscape.

Whatever you decide upon, it must not be left to architects alone. Everybody must participate. And for this you need to have an effective discussion and decision-making organization, some-

built upon cities—the old must be destroyed before the new can come up. But here you have the space to plan something new, here you can still try things. This is what makes Auroville so exciting.

*From an interview by Alan*

## Matrimandir

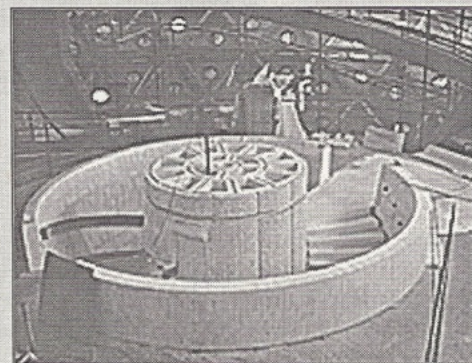
### Marble days

#### The progress of marble finishing revealed

**T**o celebrate the new millennium and to have a glimpse of what will come, the plastic coverings on all finished stone cladding inside the Matrimandir were removed for a few days during the first week of January 2000. What emerged was beautiful. The floors at the entrances have a pattern of grey granite and grey marble, which gradually changes into white, to realise a smooth transition between the grey granite of the outside pathways and the white marble of the inside. The benches at the first level, where the people will put on socks, are in a pure white marble with a simple ornamental line of inlaid gold embedded in glass. The steps of the staircase leading to the second level are of unblemished white marble too, cased between two walls that have a mixed white-grey pattern. One of the walls is made of smooth marble; the other one consists of a mosaic of thousands of small marble pieces; square, round, polished and uneven. The floor of the second level is also done in white marble, as are the insides of each of the four ribs, in the middle of which one sees the (unfinished) symbol of Sri Aurobindo. As one proceeds up the ramp to the Chamber, one can look down and see The Mother's symbol at the centre of the circular staircase, laid in pristine white.

Andrej is currently responsible for this work, together with "our family of 19 Aurovilians and workers," as he puts it. Asked when it all will be finished, he laughs. "We planned a lot, and it all didn't work. The progress of the work is not in our hands. When I realised that, I stopped worrying about it." "Absolute dedication is the password here," explains Dorothee, who has been working on the marble for many years. "The work is painstaking, requires accuracy and, consequently, is slow. We have tried in the past to speed it up by hiring marble specialists from Rajasthan, but their work has not been up to the quality we want and much has to be redone. We have found that the love that unskilled but dedicated Aurovilians put into this work gives the best quality."

*Carel*



**The Mother's symbol at the centre of the staircase**

## Organization & Economy

# "I learned to be strong."

## Kripa's experience in the Working Committee

AuroKripa was born in Auroville. At 16, she went to France for higher studies where she earned her baccalaureate and then trained as a youth counsellor. Upon her return to Auroville seven years later, she plunged into one of the most taxing jobs in the community, that of the Working Committee, the body that represents the community of Auroville in India.

**W**hen I returned in 1998, I wanted to help out in a big way. I did not want to be stuck in my corner of Auroville. Two weeks after I was back, I joined the Health Centre helping in the rehabilitation of handicapped kids. I wasn't satisfied though. I wanted to be involved in Auroville's growth on a larger scale. I was then approached to join the Working Committee. And I thought, "Why not?" Having been out for so long, I had all this energy and I wanted to put it at Auroville's service before the amoebas ate it all up! The first year was really intense. Our Working Committee just inherited a bundle of papers, all mixed up, from the previous Working Committee. And it took us three months of reading, sorting papers and meeting daily just to understand what the job meant!"



**AuroKripa**

### Personal growth

"At a personal level too I had to go through a lot of adjustment in that first year. Most Aurovilians have known me since I was a baby.

And many still treated me as one: patting me on the head and calling me cute. As long as one is young and does not express what one wants to

say, this is fine. But as a Working Committee member, I had to express my views on various issues at different meetings. And many of the people at these meetings were people who had known me since I was a child—teachers, family friends etc.—and it really upset them if I held a different opinion from them. They could not handle it and stopped relating to me in a friendly way. And that put our whole relationship since childhood into question. It was difficult, at first, to handle such situations. I could not understand why people could not hold differing points of view and still be friends... Also, being the first young woman to be in the Working Committee, there was an image projected onto me. People had certain expectations of me that they wanted me to fulfill. I had to learn to be strong, to keep my integrity, and not be pulled into such emotional games.

"The trouble with people here is that they all have such strong personalities! In France, I was used to working in a team. But here it is different. For each person is a character representing something, a personification of some force. And it is really tiring to be involved in meetings and dealing with four or five such persons on a daily basis. And, unlike the outside world, we have no social laws or behavioural patterns to restrict us. We are what we are all the time.

### Reaching out to the community

"One of the nice things though, about our

Working Committee team, is that most of us have been here since the early days of Auroville. Practically everyone knows us. People passing by drop in at our office in Bharat Nivas for a chat or a tea, or just to listen to our discussions. Our doors are always open. And this has made the Working Committee a more integral part of the community. The young people especially have a better sense now of what the Working Committee represents and can relate to it. Otherwise they found it too political or official or boring with too many meetings and were not interested in the job. The open interactions between the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council and the community that our Working Committee introduced has also helped to bridge the gap between the community and its legal organisational body, the Auroville Foundation.

"Our official term of office is over in July 2000. But I would like to see the community start the process of selecting a new Working Committee fairly soon, so that we can work together say for a period of three months to successfully hand over the responsibilities of the office. I must state however that the Working Committee is just a part of my life and not my full life. I am still very much involved in youth activities, especially in organising Kailash, (a residential youth project) and setting up the Youth Council. And my free time goes to a house, a partner, a dog, a horse, a sister with two kids, friends, and all the rest..."

*Bindu*





# Udavi Joins Auroville

SAIER takes responsibility for the Udavi School at Edayanchavadi

"I want to change this whole region," The Mother said to her Italian disciple Nata. She asked him to do something for Edayanchavadi, a village nearby Auroville.

The Mother gave the project in Edayanchavadi, at the time one of the poorest, most desperate villages in the region, the name "Udavi," which is the Tamil word for "help." Nata set up a small dispensary, provided a well, created a store for essential commodities and started a crèche for the "pathetic weebegone children." It was a first step. "We must follow them up," said The Mother, and it was decided to start "Auroshikha Agarbathies," an incense factory which provided the villagers with work and which used part of its profits to sponsor the Udavi project. "As long as it is done with selflessness and for the purposes it is meant for I shall put my Force behind it," said Mother. Soon the crèche was joined by a kindergarten, followed by a primary school.

When Nata passed away in 1985, Guy Myotte continued to manage Auroshikha. The school was carried on by Maggi and by Anuben, the headmistress of Udavi since the seventies. Says Anuben: "In the years that followed the school obtained government recognition, and with financial help from the Foundation for World Education and Italian donors, a new compound and a beautiful new school building, designed and built by Aurovilians Popo and Rolf, were added to the existing structures. The school has now about 250 children."

### Problems

"The first ten years in Edayanchavadi," says Guy, "were a wonderful adventure. I lived in Udavi. The villages called on me for help in emergencies, also for private problems, and the working atmosphere was very harmonious. But a shadow was cast in the late eighties when it became increasingly difficult to meet the demands of a militant labour union. As threats of violence became normal, I had to leave Udavi in 1989. Nine years later, in 1998, the agitation reached its peak. Negotiations broke down, the factory staff was threatened, and in September 1998 one of my supervisors was beaten up. We had to lock the factory. As the school workers

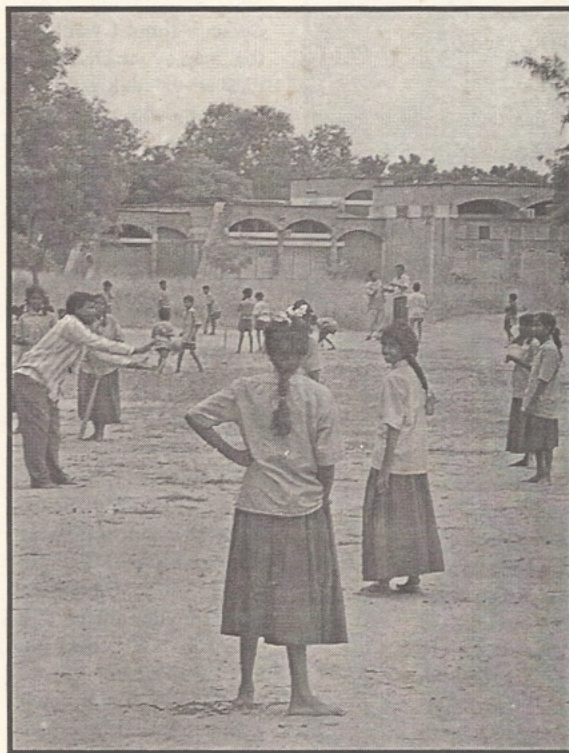


PHOTO: CAREL

At the playground of Udavi Gentillesse School

showed solidarity with the factory workers and as the safety of the teachers could not be ensured, the school closed as well. In January 1999, when protracted negotiations failed, it was finally decided to close down the factory. We petitioned the village panchayat and other officials many times to help us to re-open the school by guaranteeing the safety of the teachers, but there was no willingness to do so."

### Searching for a solution

"A solution had to be found," recalls Maggi, "and I asked Sanjeev if Auroville would be interested to manage the school." It was the beginning of a series of long talks in which Jürgen of Palmyra also got involved. Says Jürgen: "We met

with Guy and some village elders and parents, and we were able to mediate. At last everybody agreed that the difficulty with Auroshikha should not be carried over to the school, and that the school could be reopened. But some teachers had meanwhile found other jobs. As the involvement of Auroville was acceptable to all, an agreement was reached that Auroville's SAIER will manage the school, while the Sri Aurobindo Udyog Trust, to whom Auroshikha contributes its profits, will continue to bear the costs for some years."

"So the school re-opened in July this year," says Anuben, "and I am very happy for the children here are like my own children. But the situation has changed. We no longer provide uniforms and meals and the parents have to contribute more money for the education. But I think that they are happy, for Udavi remains a high quality school where nearly all children pass the matriculation exams in the English language. The parents have also come to accept that creative work (dance, drama and singing) and sports are included in the curriculum. And we are considering including some vocational training for girls, such as tailoring."

### Plans

The plans for the future? Says Sanjeev: "This school has a lot of potential. We aspire to make Udavi a model school for the environment, perhaps for the country, by introducing the educational concepts of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and in that way realising an integral education. The International School of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, is already doing this. If we could do something similar here, it would be a great contribution from Auroville."

*In conversations with Carel*



# A Learning Experience

Dr. Lucas Dengel speaks about his experience of promoting organic cashew cultivation.

All around Auroville, interspersed with Auroville land, are cashew plantations owned by local farmers. Cashew cultivation was introduced in this area about 30 years ago and soon became popular, for it is well-suited to the red laterite soil of this region, is less labour-intensive, and commands a significant cash value. The cyclical cashew phenomenon is part of the Auroville experience. In the balmy months from January to March, the air is first suffused with the sweet, heavy scent of cashew flowers, but then later as the fruit starts to grow, it is replaced by the nauseous smell of deadly chemical pesticides which are sprayed on the trees. The cashew fields around Auroville are also composted with unseparated urban waste from Pondicherry, leading to an increase in disease. Concerned by the detrimental health effects caused by the use of unsorted waste and chemical pesticides, Dr. Lucas Dengel, a medical doctor by profession, has been determinedly working, under the unit AuroAnnam (see Brief News Item), to persuade cashew farmers to use organic methods of cultivation.

### Learning from the past

A few years ago, Lucas started out with a two-pronged aim: firstly, to collect, separate and produce organic waste; and secondly, to persuade Kuilapalayam farmers to have a one-acre trial

plot in their cashew topes where they would use not chemical but botanical pesticides (*See AVToday #112*.) Today Lucas realizes that both the projects, while not exactly successes, were learning experiences. Says he, "despite my success in collecting, sorting and processing all the waste in the Kuilapalayam area, I could produce only 200 tons of compost a year, but the Kuilapalayam farmers alone use up to 2000 tons of compost. Now I realize that the problem lies not with the farmers importing the compost but with Pondicherry for failing to sort out its waste. For ideally, it is a natural cycle that food exported from the rural area to the cities comes back as compost for the fields. The only problem is that organic waste gets mixed with the inorganic, and worse still, medicinal waste, of the city."

"As for persuading the farmers not to use chemical pesticides, I realized I was going about it the wrong way. I was relying solely on creating awareness amongst them about the dangers of chemical pesticides. And as such, in terms of reducing the use of chemical pesticides, the project met with only marginal success. Today, I realize that as cashew cultivation is a significant income-generating venture for the farmers, I need to offer business incentives in order to persuade the farmers to go organic. So now I am trying to provide a market for organic cashews, and soon I

hope to be able to offer a contract to the farmers where I buy their entire produce if they do not use chemical pesticides. Ideally, in order to build trust, I would like to be able to pre-finance a part, say one-fourth of the value, of their harvest. I hope to be able to enter into such a contract with two or three farmers for the next harvest. In this pilot phase, I prefer to keep the numbers low to ensure better control. Also, given the magnitude of cashew production, there are not just enough organic inputs available in the market to introduce organic farming on a large scale.

"By collaborating closely with the farmers I will have a better chance of educating them about the benefits of organic compost and introducing other organic farming techniques."

"Cashew has acquired a bad name in Auroville as it is associated with money, monoculture, and pesticide use. Consequently, in Auroville, we neglect our cashew plantations and get only half of its potential yield, losing thousands of rupees in income each year. Cashew is ideal for this region and climate and can be grown organically in a mixed cultivation programme with companion fruit trees, fence plants and ground cover. At AuroAnnam we hope that we can slowly bring about a change in this negative attitude, and consequently promote organic farming."

*Bindu*



### Awards for Aurovillian

AuroSatprem, who works with the Auroville Building Centre and specializes in earth construction, has received a number of awards recently. They include the 1999 gold medal of the India Trade Promotion Organization for a disaster-resistant house, the "Bharat Excellence Award" for services to the promotion of India-International co-operation, the "Nation's Vikas Jyoti Award" for individual achievement for the growth of the Indian economy, and the "Bharthiya Nirman Ratan Award", an excellence award for construction in India.

### AuroAnnam

AuroAnnam, a unit set up by Dr. Lucas (see elsewhere on this page), has as its mission statement "to promote organic farming and sustainable management of natural resources, to provide high quality organic produce to consumers, and to offer fair trade practices where the profits are shared with the growers and for promotional activities."

AuroAnnam has recently started a 14-acre demonstration-plot at the northern end of Auro Orchard. It networks with local organic cashew growers, and seeks to improve their yield by introducing proven organic techniques. This year AuroAnnam provided market support to 17 organic cashew growers by buying their harvest, and introduced organic cashew nuts into the market in Mumbai and South India.

### New CIRHU proposal

Dr. Kireet Joshi has sent a detailed concept paper to all Aurovilians concerning how he would like to see the Centre of International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU) develop. He sees CIRHU becoming the vehicle for university level education and international research based around the theme of human unity. There would be a central faculty which would take up research in evolution, the synthesis of knowledge, synthesis of culture, human unity and the next species. There would also be seven other faculties, including a Faculty of Indian Culture and Human Unity and a Faculty of Futuristic Sociology and Business Management.

The community has been invited to give feedback on this proposal.

### Kaluvely Nilam

The bio-regional co-ordination group has been bringing out a newsletter called *Kaluvely Nilam* (the land of Kaluvely) and distributing it in local villages. The latest issue, which has both Tamil and English versions, contains poems, information on local trees and plants, a profile of Munnoor village, as well as simple introductions to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

### Aurospirul goes vegetarian

Aurospirul, situated in the Auroville beach community 'Simplicity', produces an excellent form of spirulina, an edible micro algae. Some time ago, the Aurovilians manufacturing Aurospirul—spirulina capsules—were facing a problem. Their product was advertised as being 100% vegetarian, but the only capsules available in India were made from gelatine, which is definitely not vegetarian in origin. Hendrik of the Aurospirul unit appealed on the compas. forum for help and was overwhelmed by the response. For, through the help of an Aurovillian in the U.S., Aurospirul has managed to obtain 100,000 vegetarian capsules free. That's an awful lot of health...

### Timely rains

A 25 cm rain over two days in mid-December allayed fears that the winter monsoon would be deficient this year. It brought the total rainfall for the year up to average—about 130 centimetres.



## "Let the main act start!"

(continued from page 1)

one-year newcomer period—we could offer several different versions of how people could relate to Auroville. After all, when Mother speaks about people contributing to Auroville she says it can be in terms of work, money or yoga. What does this imply?

### Letting go of the past

**AVT: On a personal level, have you found it easy to let go of the past?**

F: I think that in the particular conditioning of Auroville's past, some of us went into a fighting posture, and can't come out anymore. When I was in Russia I had a kind of vision. I saw an armada of ships gathering on the ocean, beyond the horizon, making ready to land in Auroville. Each of these ships had a long, high standing section of something which together gave the shape, like a silhouette, of the whole of Auroville. Someone was arranging the ships to land in the right order. And while they were being arranged, I could recognise that each one of our old enemies was a part of that, and I could even recognise some of them. When I came back to Auroville, I decided that no longer could I live conditioned by the past and I went and met nearly all my former enemies.

Another personal learning experience: in 1988, when the Auroville Foundation Act was being introduced in Parliament, I suddenly had the feeling that I was a totally free man and that this chapter of my Auroville life was closed. But

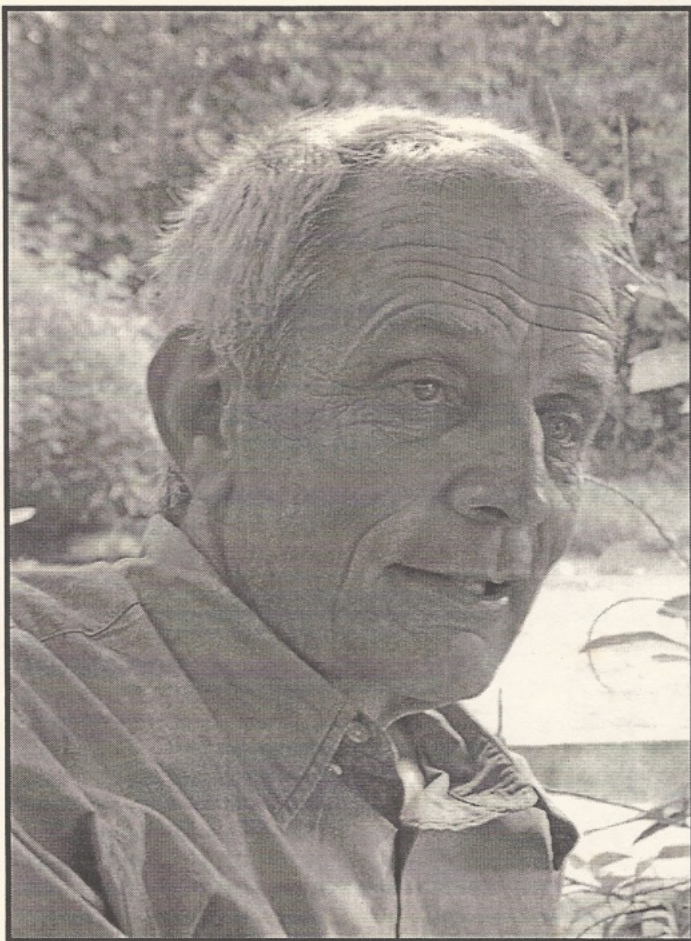


PHOTO: CAREL

many attachments and feelings of being important kept me associated with this political dimension. I should have acted on the call to change, but I did not listen carefully, and I went through a very difficult time: I went for the "slap by the Divine." I had never realized how persistent this identification of my own importance with projects is.

I do not think that in any life you can get away without getting into a battle, but if you can distill the real meaning of this battle into your life, then you can be a help in this community. A living love, that is what the older ones should be.

But there's another thing: the difference between the next generation and mine is more than just a generation gap. They are differently wired from me, they are free from many of the pains I have. And the next generation might be as different from their par-

ents again. So I cannot really tell a youngster "Do it like this". I can only see whether they are fully committed to what they do and say.

### Find the centre

**AVT: Why is commitment so important?**

F: One thing I have experienced in extreme circumstances is the overwhelming feeling that "this has to be done" and then I have gone and done it, regardless: it is as if a dam bursts inside you. It happened when I had to see Rajiv Gandhi over problems with the Foundation Act. And it happened in Germany when I was having a heart operation. A blockage in an artery had to be opened by a wire, but the wire would not go through. I was watching it on a screen. When the surgeon suggested trying it again some other time, something in me shouted within "Sri Aurobindo!", and the wire went through. We call only in extreme cases. If only we could do it every moment of our lives...

For the time is ripe for something new. There will be a difficult transition period—our external forms have calcified and do not seem to move—but in Auroville we have an incredible bunch of individuals who are full of goodwill and aspiration, and there is a real support structure in the present Governing Board and the Government of India.

But if we really are to move, if we really are to find that centre which allows free groupings, we have to come back to the Matrimandir: there is no other solution. As Paulo Tomassi once said, pointing to it, "The future is being written there".

From an interview by Alan and Carel

## The blessings of chaos

A chaotic organisation forces us to find guidance within. An interview with Barbara

Chaos is a science that studies patterns of disorder. It is also the epithet used by quite a few Aurovilians to describe Auroville's organisation. But is chaos necessarily negative? Barbara doesn't think so. She joined Auroville three and a half years ago after having worked as a psychosomatic therapist in Germany and Spain. Ever since she has been helping Aurovilians to solve their own personal patterns of disorder, on the bases of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's works. In the process, she has gained some insight into the organisational problems of Auroville. But contrary to popular opinion, she sees light at the end of the tunnel.

Barbara (laughing): "The label 'chaos' seems indeed to fit Auroville's organisation, for there is plenty of disorder! But I have observed that this chaos is integral, holistic; everything is related to everything else. When something breaks down, it has an effect on the whole. As a consequence, individual answers to isolated problems are no longer sufficient, they too must be integral, related to the whole.

"Auroville, as I see it, is in front of the Unknowable, the source from which everything comes each moment. Something is coming to an end; it does not mean that it is dying, but that it is in the process of transformation. Frozen energies have to be broken up and become free. Out of the unknown and out of the impossibility new possibilities will emerge.

"So I would define chaos as "restructuring by The Mother." For it is only She who builds the Organisation, there is none other. We should understand that we have come for the work of The Mother, that we do not have the answers, and that we have to go inside to the centre of our being, to receive true inspiration and true creativity. We have to realise that the work is being done through the Intervention and Grace of The Mother, through Her Force. We are not the doers, we only have to collaborate. The skills and talents of each and every one will come out and be used, as and when She needs them. The true organisation will come through Her, whether we understand it or not."

### The need for the psychic discovery

"It is my experience," continues Barbara, "that many Aurovilians have accumulated a store of past hurts, fears and fixed conceptions, both in their individual lives as well as in regard to their trust in Auroville. Many have a difficulty or even unwillingness to 'let go' and be once again open to the unexpected. The outer chaos forces us to learn, adapt and transcend. As such, chaos is grace. For we should realise that when we stay fixed or remain in disharmonious or even bitter thoughts, we stay on the surface level and hold

ourselves back from making the next step. Sri Aurobindo and Mother have given many indications how to reject all this, and how to open to the discovery of the psychic being which solves the sense of separateness and brings the sense of love and the awareness of belonging to One family. Aspiration and surrender are the keys."

### The importance of the Matrimandir

Mother spoke about the difficulties of the Auroville organisation in the early seventies, at the time of the so-called "Aspiration talks," and mentions how each of us pulls in his or her own direction.<sup>(1)</sup> "Since that time something has changed," says Barbara "and that is the gradual emergence of the Matrimandir. I believe that many in Auroville underestimate the importance of this building for their inner development.

When Mother mentioned that She would put Her force there, and that the sooner it would be ready the better it would be, in particular for the Aurovilians, She made a statement which is not yet sufficiently understood. Matrimandir is a powerhouse, though as yet vastly under-utilised. It is a tremendous help for learning to go within, into the centre of the creative Force, from where the real answers to our problems will come; for the Matrimandir is a living symbol of that which wants to come into consciousness and manifestation.

"So we live in a very beautiful moment. What seems to be a loss or chaos or confusion is only an opportunity for us to open, and to grow towards the next step."

In conversation with Carel

(1) Conversation on March 10, 1970.



PHOTO: CAREL

## Chaos and renewal

### A reflection

Rebirth, renewal. It's an image which is central to many religious and occult traditions, for it is a powerful representation of the transformative power of the spirit. Paradoxically India, for all its traditions, orthodoxies and casteism, embodies an enormous capacity for such renewal, whereas the West, for all its trumpeting of the virtues of change, seems stuck in a kind of cul-de-sac. The late Raghubir Singh, one of India's finest photographers, put it like this when asked why he worked only with colour. "The fundamental condition of the West is one of guilt, linked to death—from which black is inseparable. The fundamental condition of India, however, is the cycle of rebirth, in which colour is not just an essential element but also a deep inner resource ... the Indian view of life resonates with optimism, with sparkle, with illusion, with lively pictorialism and the bonding spirit of community."

Auroville, for all its occidental influences, is much closer to India than the West in this respect. I'm constantly astonished by the space we are given here to renew ourselves, to slough old skins and begin again. And it's not so much an outer space—we're far from being a truly tolerant society on the outer level—as an inner freedom to experiment, to change direction. To recreate ourselves in the image of something truer, something closer to the integral being which, inchoately, we sense deep within.

A characteristic of Auroville over the years is a certain degree of outer chaos and disorder. We are often criticised for this. Yet at some unconscious level perhaps we sense that structure, given the present state of our collective consciousness, is often merely a straight-jacket manufactured by the mind—the "mind-forg'd manacles" described by William Blake—for our richer faculties of imagination and intuition.

Perhaps this is why many of us continue to prefer the fruitful chaos of the East to the anaesthetised precincts of the West. And why Auroville's salvation may finally owe more to its inspired failures than to its respectable successes.

Alan



# Pushed by a Higher Force

## Interview with Srimoyi

Srimoyi, a Bengali Aurovilian, talks to Auroville Today about renewal in her personal life: her days in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, her life in the Green Belt, her perspectives on Auroville and her experience that there is a higher force that guides her steps...

"I came to the Aurobindo Ashram in 1969," Srimoyi begins. "That was a crucial year. It seems a lot of people came in '69. I arrived with my mother to join the school and I remember taking the application form to Kireet-bhai, [at present Chairman of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation, eds.] who was then the headmaster. 'But you must bring me a photo,' he said. And then he admired it, and said, 'What a sweet photo' and I felt he himself was very sweet."

### Free

Srimoyi is a natural storyteller, punctuating her tale with laughter and self-deprecating humour. She uses everything—her hands, her eyes—to bring us closer to the nuance of the moment. "When I joined," she continues, "my whole life changed. Before, I was this scared kid who did very badly in exams and had no self-confidence. But when I came into the Ashram atmosphere something happened. I started doing really well in everything. I just loved it!"

After finishing her studies, Srimoyi decided to see the wide world, and left Pondicherry for Bombay, "because that's the place where there are no relatives. I was free! Otherwise, you have hordes of relatives trying to get you married. So I

just did all kinds of work and had a great old time. I also did a lot of interesting things, like theatre and dance, and I discovered that's really what interests me: the performing arts. And then I had enough of Bombay and all that, so in 1986 I came back to Pondicherry to live and work with Igor on Udayan farm, opposite Hope."

### Time for a change

But after eight years of marriage and relative isolation in the greenbelt, it was time for a change. "I moved out of Udayan and came to live in Samasti, and soon afterwards took charge of the Samasti Guest-house. Often, the guests at the Guest-house ask me what makes me stay, because they're curious about how life is here. I tell them that it is Mother and Sri Aurobindo who make me stay, and that we Aurovilians are nothing special, only, that we have agreed to do something special. I would say that my move *bang* in the middle of Auroville was arranged by a higher force, which is always there."

Is this force she speaks about the Force that many Aurovilians feel is



PHOTO: CAREL

behind Auroville?

"Yes, I think so, says Srimoyi. "It is this Force which is not only pushing me, but everybody here in Auroville, making use of our strengths and weaknesses alike, and which is always pushing us forwards towards the goal. It is because I know there is a Force behind the outer events that I can accept all these impossibilities that Auroville has at present. For Auroville is certainly not what it should be, or what Mother envisioned. We have to become more sincere, and I am convinced that if we all try, solutions will come. Because every good or bad step that we do in Auroville has a repercussion in the world outside. There is a sort of resonance. So we should be very conscious. The real problem is that we sometimes forget why we are here. If we could only remember we are here for the New World, and we have to work towards building the New World! I don't know exactly what it means, but I know there will be a New World, because without it life is not worth living."

"I would like to see our society make the children and the youngsters the centre of all our activities, as it is they who have to prepare and be ready for the new consciousness. We should plan everything, all our activities with this in mind. We must have the spirit of adventure, learn to give up our insecurities and take a jump whenever necessary. After all, if we are doing the right thing in all sincerity, the force is there to look after and protect us."

Interview by Jill and Roger

# "Let's keep breathing"

## Marco Feira, executive of the Miniature furniture unit, on his hopes for the economy and a new spirit of business

The decision of the Entry Group to close its doors has had a considerable effect. Much has been called into question on a general level. Meetings have taken place, a number of them at Marco's place. Is a new orientation taking shape?

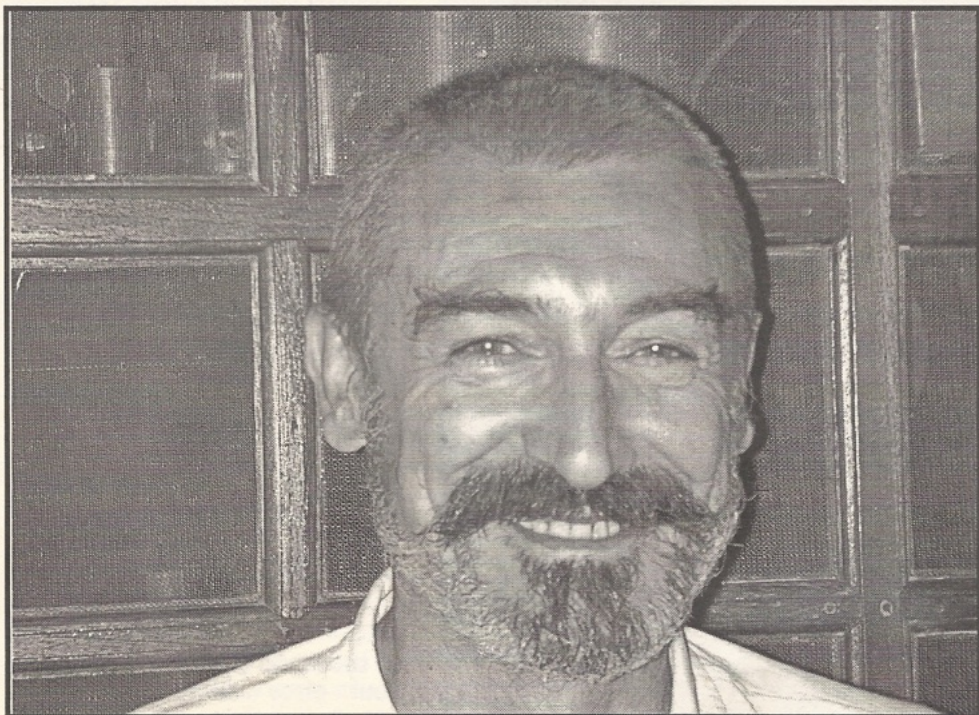
"When I learnt that the Entry Group had temporarily closed the doors to Newcomers to Auroville, my first reaction was one of shock: no, Auroville has to remain open! Then, after reflecting on it, it became clear to me that it was a good thing, a provocation of sorts that would call much into question. And that it certainly did. There was a lot of searching for solutions in the meetings that happened at the T'ai Chi Hall above my house, though it was strange to see that neither the people without proper housing, nor the architects or contractors, showed up. This does not mean that only a few people are concerned by the housing problem. The others may have resigned themselves to the impossibility of solving it, or simply are tired of meetings."

### Difficulties for Newcomers

"It is clear that it is not possible today to come to Auroville and participate in the dream without money. Newcomers have to come with enough money to cover their daily needs. Apart from that, they have to build a house. And the latter, in particular, is a big barrier. There have been a few magnificent exceptions, like the Hungarians Laszlo and Eva who came without money and, thanks to a lot of love and help, were able to stay. But this is the exception that confirms the rule. And everyone has to admit that it has nonetheless been very difficult for them."

"Another serious problem is that we have still not managed to provide everybody with a decent maintenance. People who have their own sources of income can normally afford a decent lifestyle."

PHOTO: EMILIE



But those who depend on the community are in a far more difficult position.

"I have the feeling that people are scared. For a dozen or so years many people have been building houses with an extra room or even an annex. These are rented out to guests, which allows Aurovilians to make ends meet at the month's end. How to let go of these forms of financial security? Are we ready to give the little that we have to build for those who are coming? I am afraid that the answer is 'no'."

### Can commercial units help?

"During the meetings we also tried to understand the way our commercial units are functioning, and wondered if they could participate in financing new dwellings by using their reserves. It became clear that doing business in Auroville is far from easy. Business executives must deal with a range of administrative and bureaucratic headaches inherent to the Indian business context. On top of that, they have to deal with a negative image of business in Auroville which has grown up in the last years, and which has led business executives to close up psychologically. But this has to change. Aurovilians should start understanding the problems a unit is facing, and the units have to become more transparent. For example, the figures of the contributions of commercial units to Auroville's Central Fund that are published every month in the Auroville News do not give a true picture, as contributions to specific projects and contributions in kind are not mentioned. But the units themselves could help a great deal by establishing a climate of greater co-operation and openness."

"In the meetings the question was raised as to why the units feel the need to maintain sometimes large reserves. There are a few reasons. One is that Auroville units, unlike commercial units elsewhere, cannot get bank loans to finance their operations, as they do not own their buildings and cannot use them as collateral. So reserves need to be built up to finance ongoing

operations and finance future expansions. Another reason for a reserve is to act as security in case a problem arises. This is even more necessary as there is no support available elsewhere. There is no 'common fund' which can give this guarantee, and that is actually a set back. Auroville's commercial units should endeavour to create such a common fund. This would liberate money which could be used, for instance, for the construction of new houses, and in that way help us strengthen our faltering sense of unity. But we still have a long way to go for that to happen: here, everyone keeps things—including their problems—to themselves."

The commercial units have to learn to work together: there is, for example, a need for a centralized marketing office working for all commercial units. We could also make bulk purchases of raw materials collectively. We would need a centre with a paid and impartial staff able to help all the units with the administrative and bureaucratic problems they are facing. In short, if our business units could be more open, less competitive with each other and more collaborative, it would benefit the entire community."

### Sensing a renewal?

"What's positive at present is the process, for we are not resigned. The fact that we are questioning ourselves proves that we are alive and kicking and that the community is advancing step by step. To continually question oneself is after all one of the reasons we are here. The solutions will come."

"Some proposals have already emerged from the meetings. For instance the fact that keet (*palm-leaf thatch—eds*) as a building material should be reinstated, and that each working group should ask itself how we could start receiving newcomers in a new way."

"There are a lot of things in the air. If Auroville is seen as a breathing entity—breathing in to become full and exhaling to become empty—we could say that at present we are breathing in. My hope is that we continue breathing."

From interviews by Denis and Emilie



# What makes community?

Explorations together with members of communities from around the world.

During a gathering in Verite in late November, members and supporters of a number of communities and community organisations together with Aurovilians discussed the question of "What makes community?" and other questions. The communities represented in the workshop included The Farm, a long-established community in Tennessee, USA; Nature's Spirit, a new community in South Carolina, USA, inspired by Auroville; and Lebensgarten, which is based in a collective housing project in a German city. There were also supporters of Dr. Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, representatives of the GEN network which links together eco-villages from around the world, and a coordinator of an on-line learning community in the U.S. Two organizers from Los Niños, an organization which helps poor children and families living on the Mexican/US border, also attended.

On the first afternoon notes were compared about what constitute the biggest challenges to the achievement of successful community. It turned out that different communities and organizations experience remarkably similar problems: how to empower youth? how to ensure that individual needs don't take precedence over community needs? how to ensure that everybody in the community has a chance to participate in policy-formulation and decision-making? how to make communities self-supporting and sustainable? how to retain the sense of unity when a community grows beyond a certain size?

Later participants split into three sub-groups to discuss governance, sustainability and the nature of a learning community. The latter group, in particular, came up with some interesting

ideas. For example, after an Aurovilian stated that we lack tools in Auroville to create and nurture community, a visitor described an intensive two-week course in building community which he had attended in Germany. He learned how easy it was to hide his feelings and project only a positive image for the first few days, but this became increasingly difficult as time wore on. Feelings of genuine community only grew when he and others dropped their defences and began being honest about their failings and fears.

Another participant in this group described a tool called "insight dialogue". The purpose of insight dialogue is to help people identify their underlying assumptions, and so understand how they have been conditioned. A non-controversial topic is chosen, and then participants observe, in a non-judgmental way, how others express themselves. They then suggest what their root assumptions appear to be. The eventual aim is for a group to help each other move beyond personal conditionings to arrive at a higher level of understanding.

Another tool with a similar aim was introduced on the second afternoon of the workshop. "Cultural synergy", explained a member of Nature's Spirit community, is an approach to conflict resolution. It involves first recognizing one's own view, then fully understanding the very different view of another. The final stage involves holding the integrity of each view, then moving backwards and forwards between them until a new possibility, a totally new perspective, intuitively emerges.

## The focal point

Many of these techniques seem to work well

on a one-to-one basis, but how to unify larger groupings of people? One Aurovilian reminded us that this was one of the original intentions behind the construction of Matrimandir—to provide a focal point where Aurovilians, through working together, could transcend their differences. The Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka utilises a similar approach through its "Shramadana" work camps. These bring together everybody from a particular village or region to work on a practical project of common benefit. As the organizers of Los Niños pointed out, when people who have been in conflict work together on fulfilling a common need, they begin to experience each other as comrades rather than as enemies...and then a whole lot of other things become possible.

All this was interesting. But as the second afternoon wore on there was a sense that the workshop, which brought together people with so much experience and community wisdom, was not fulfilling its full potential. Granted, there had

been many interesting individual interactions, we had sung songs and meditated together. Yet certain things were missing. One was an exploration of how communities differ, and how Auroville, in particular, does not conform to any community stereotype. For here the emphasis is upon an inner discovery leading to inner identity with others, rather than upon the cultivation of outward forms of togetherness. What was also lacking was the living sense of what community is, and why people choose this way of life. Then Bico, a nineteen year old who was born and grew up on The Farm, spoke. "Why community? I'll tell you. I grew up in a place where I saw people feel love for their friends, and where we kids were told to listen to what is deep inside ourselves rather than others, and have the courage to act on that. That is real powerful learning. And then, living closely with so many special people on The Farm and seeing how they dealt with problems, I've had tremendous opportunities to grow." Jesse, a supporter and active participant in Nature's Spirit community, ended by offering an interesting redefinition of community which could well be a starting-point for future workshops. "Every one of us is community. If every part of us, every cell in our bodies, is always serving others and listening for a higher note, we ARE community wherever we are."



## Inspiration: From Medhananda

### A step beyond man

What is important in the experiment "Auroville" is not the possibility of discovering a clever new way of organising human communal life. It is the possibility of a first step beyond man. Even if this step is faltering, it does not matter. What matters is that for the first time man tries out whether evolution itself can evolve, or whether humanity and thinking and common sense are forever his final limitations.

A clever organisation, an illusory success of common life, would be the end of the experiment. As long as mental endeavours fail, there is hope.

There have been many pious communities in the past trying to build the city of God, who succeeded in living peacefully together for some time. A success of such a kind would be a catastrophe for Auroville. The oneness Sri Aurobindo explored was not to be imposed by rules and regulations, or even saintly behaviour.

Only a sudden mutation can take us beyond man. Auroville is such a force field for mutation. So don't expect to find here bigger potatoes!

*(Medhananda, who left his body at the age of 86 in 1996, joined the Ashram in 1952. The Mother put him in charge of establishing and running the Sri Aurobindo Library. Medhananda lived in Auroville, in Fraternity, for a couple of years in the late 1970s. This passage was recently discovered in one of his notebooks, and probably dates from that time.)*

## Open Forum

# Random Thoughts

"The twenty-first century will be spiritual or will not be ." (André Malraux)

Kurtz's revelation ("The horror, the horror!") at the end of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness could well serve as an epitaph for our now departed twentieth century. "A century of sophisticated savagery," opined Maurice Strong in Auroville recently. A century littered with the bloodied signposts of ideology. And yet its fields of death were also sown with the seeds of a new and formidable spiritual renaissance and awakening.

At present we live in accelerated times, and in only one century we have seen what was a revolutionary force in many parts of the world, nationalism, turn into something both archaic and retrograde. There have been quantum leaps in science and technology, but they have not been paralleled by any fundamental change in human nature, and "man unkind"—to quote E.E. Cummings—still rules. But luckily spirit—not man or even nature—controls the acceleration at work.

But the old gods of empire and conquest know how to transmigrate. Globalization, a concept that inspires some set on making the world, its markets and biological wealth safe for wholesale plunder if not take-over by multinationals, is a case in point. Yesterday's empires have become electronic. The global village, although no longer just a visionary concept, nonetheless remains more of a virtual than an embodied reality. Concepts and ideas that harbour a new truth are skillfully taken over by the powers that be and reduced to catchy advertising phrases or

cynical sound-bites.

The French author André Malraux once declared, with a certain Gallic grandiloquence, that the twenty-first century would be spiritual or not at all. Hopefully, the spiritual will be at least a growing strain and influence in the times to

come. At the dawning of the twenty-first century, the identities of individuals and communities have become increasingly multicultural and globally aware, if not spiritually inclined. Many no longer owe their allegiance to nation states but to the planet as a whole. We have begun to shed the

myth of our powerlessness to affect and initiate change. The work of many concerned individuals and NGOs is a result of this awareness. And it is frequently far more effective than that of the governments of nation states, whose conflicting priorities and interests do so much to render a global

body such as the UN—heralded with such hope at its inception only fifty years ago—a limping, stymied behemoth.

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past", observed George Orwell about dominant views of history. Yet parallel or alternative views of our history and evolutionary destiny are emerging. In some ways it would seem that our planet has become a colliding particle chamber of multiple realities, worlds, views and visions of the future (witness the recent mayhem in Seattle). No doubt what is established will carry on with its centuries-old momentum, while simultaneously, under cover of darkness, the new and subtle will infiltrate, inspire and subvert. As its epiphanies—delicate and minute—multiply and spread, as matter begins to vibrate at a higher frequency, and time collapses inward towards its source, will we see a sudden reversal and a new inrush of spiritual energies, breaking the dams of perception in a thousand sun-bursts of the soul? We live in interesting times.

Roger

"A thousand sun-bursts of the Soul": discs waiting to be installed at Matrimandir.

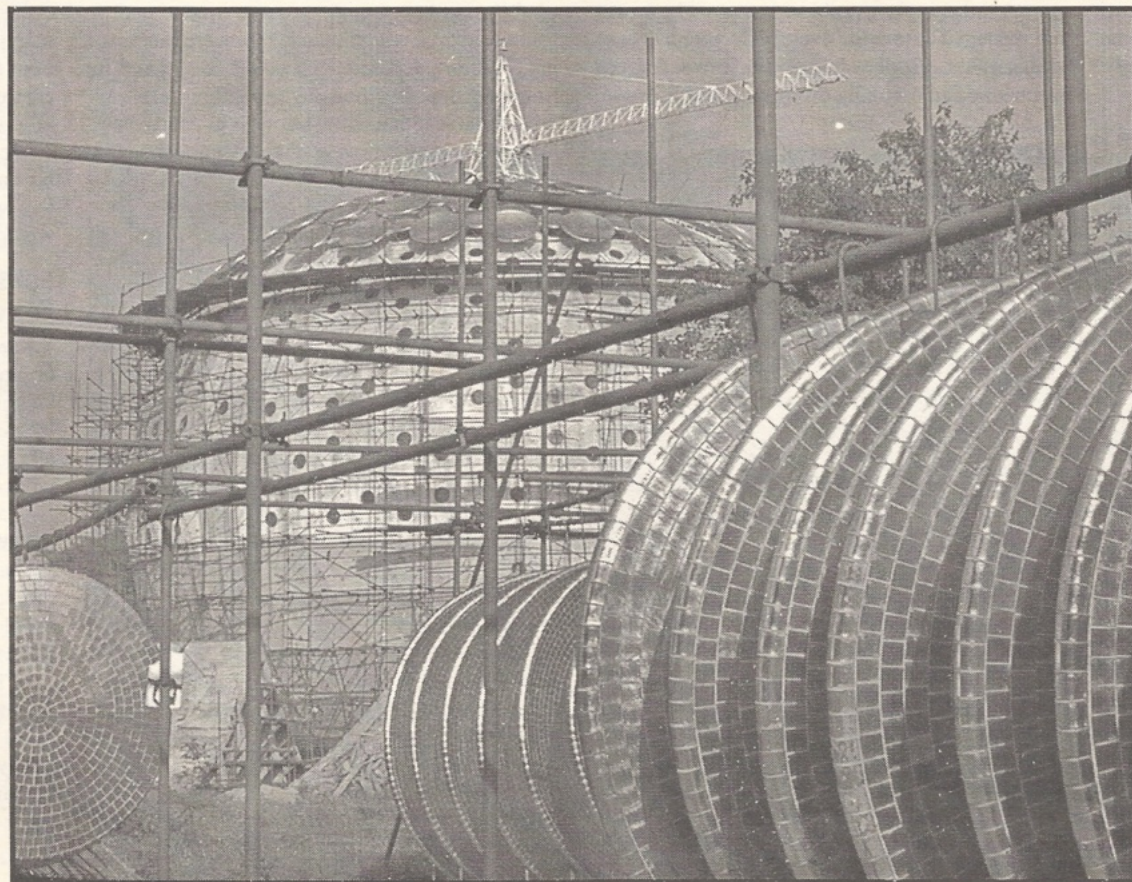


PHOTO: CAREL



# Millennium Festival

## Harichandra and The Liquidator Art Club: two interesting cultural events

The month of January saw the efforts of many artists who performed or presented their work in Auroville. The range was wide, from the intense sci-fi happening at Kalabhumis to the performance of New Year's Music 2000 by the Auroville choir and orchestra at Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. We describe two of these events.

### The Liquidator Art Club

"The truth is never what it seems, so even if you have been victorious at first, don't be misled: the battle is never ending."

The inchoate cry of youth raged across Kalabhumis amphitheatre: the call was for FREEDOM, TRUTH and THE SOUL, mixed with a good dose of punk rock by "Paysan" (featuring Fanny, Samai, Jonas and Matthieu). The amphitheatre itself was well used, as the entire space became the stage, and the audience never knew from where the actors would spring next. This multi-media, punk sci-fi happening had a somewhat "thin" story line, and was often punctuated by deafening blasts of sound and strangled cries of anger. The action was more illustrative than dramatic, telling a somewhat confusing story set in the future, where Evil dominates with the aid of computers, and the dictatorial programme which controls people's minds must be deactivated. Fortunately, there is a young group of rebels who are ready to fight against the evil "Guards". After many scenes of doubt, (when all looks lost) combat, mayhem and violence, the programme is destroyed. But, "Don't get too smug and complacent," say the youngsters, "at any moment the Evil One, in another guise, may rise up again-be vigilant."

The main scenes took place in a funky café called The Liquidator Art Club (also the show's title). As part of the Club's entertainment, we also watched fire juggling by Fanny and Bettina—scene breaks were imaginatively staged on a curved ramp as youngsters challenged each other in a skateboard competition.

I had a wish later that there were more evil targets aimed at, such as Vanity, Hypocrisy, Greed and Sloth, but the evil of Mind Control

seemed to be by far the most dangerous and soul corrupting, at least to the Auroville youth. "Don't be a ROBOT," they screamed.

### Harichandra: Triumph of Enthusiasm

This week, watching the New World Theatre Group's production of Harichandra, A Tale on Truth, I felt that the younger generation of actors now bursting onto the stage have a notion of what good theatre could be. Harichandra is the story of a king whose honesty is mightily tested by a sage. The tale is borrowed from the Mahabharata, and its theme is the strength of character it takes to stick to the truth, no matter what happens to you.

The play was written and directed by 26-year old Tamil Aurovilian Partha. The players included Partha, as King Harichandra, Anandamayi as the Queen, Charu as the Sage, and Muthu as Harichandra's son.

Partha's play was a triumph of enthusiasm that carried the audience over the inadequacies of a script not always eloquent enough to evoke the noble theme of "A Tale on Truth". Indeed, some of the high seriousness of the story was lost as the

colloquial language being spoken by the characters brought some unexpected, but delightful, moments of mirth to the audience. A very beautifully realised scene was when Harichandra attends to the funeral pyre of his son. The set, complete with burning wood, smoke and shadows, and the strong emotions expressed by the grief-stricken parents Anandamayi and Partha, was very evocative. In fact, the whole gorgeous set design of Aron worked perfectly with Jean Legrand's elegant slashes of light. The costumes by Uma had a sense of ease and rightness that allowed the actors to move gracefully; Igor Wakhevich's music cast a spell that conjured up kings and queens. At the centre of this creative cyclone was Joy, whose perfect patience was constantly tried during rehearsals, but whose very

presence is enough to bring a sense of clarity to the staging, as well as to the sweet and simple dance numbers which she created.

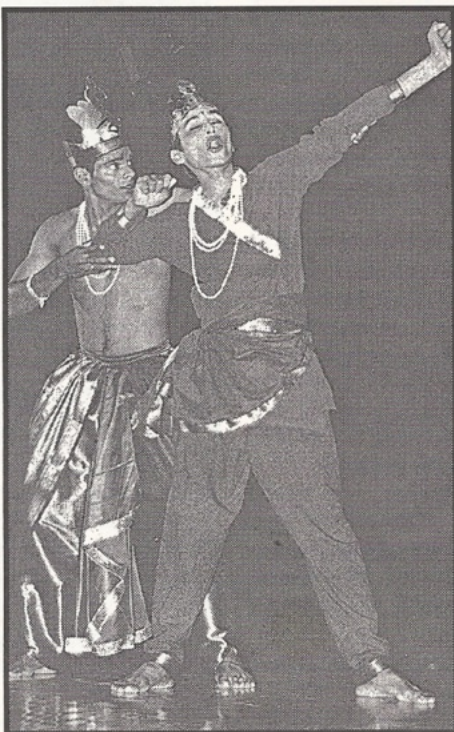
As Mauna reported on the internet "compat" forum, "This was the group's second play and the auditorium was packed with a thoroughly mixed Tamilian/Western, very responsive audience: Never before did we have such an enthusiastic, joyful, finely detailed and integrated collaboration between the two cultures."

Now that these young actors have had a taste of what it means when you have a full house and there is appreciation, lots of applause and encouragement... what next?

Can the euphoria of success be the seed of a greater commitment to quality and craft?

Besides Partha and Anandamayi, the other actors in the play were: Charu, Shakti, Shankar, Murugasen, Muthu, Jiwathama, Padpanapan, Bala, Anand, Suburaman, Ganesh, Anbu, Vadivel, Segar, Kumar, Sathish, and Ruchi.

Jill



Partha and Muthu

## World

# Parisian Nightmare

## Emilie in search of a lost past

November. We left Auroville for two weeks, and the weather was nice. We left India, country of indolent sunsets. Direction Paris! For six long months I had been separated from my city of birth, and I must admit that I looked forward to this trip. In the plane I could not stop thinking of the life beat of the city, of the noise of children playing on the squares, of wide avenues, of autumn-red trees, of the bakers' round cheeks and crunchy baguettes, of neat rows of coffee cups standing on the counter, of the hustle and bustle at the big department stores; in short, a lot of "madeleines" turned around in my head and made me smile.

The Charles de Gaulle airport received us with cold weather. Cold enough to freeze us to our bones! A steely grey coldness accompanied by a steady drizzle that enveloped the city. The cars rolled along noiselessly; there was no sound of horns, but only a monotonous rumble that surfaced, droning. The road cut through the landscape like a knife.

What a strange sensation; I had the impression of arriving in a ghost city. Yet there were people, and they were running, in every direction. The rain caused a sort of haze, I had difficulty seeing faces. Sometimes a red overcoat crossed the road or else a green umbrella, but the rest was definitely grey and black. I was looking for colour as for a safe haven, as though to reassure myself. Nothing. Muffled up, ensconced in woollen pullovers and an enormous overcoat I traversed the city in search of my memories. I understood quite soon that Paris was, to my eyes,

no longer the same.

### Paris is grey and sad

Montmartre is nothing more than a big parking lot for tourist cars, all the streets are full of boutiques that only sell unnecessary things, the Champs Elysées have found nothing better for the year 2000 celebrations than to wrap up the superb trees... The result: big garbage bags, so to speak! In the end, what is left are the historic monuments with their age-old charm. Paris has aged badly, Paris is grey and sad.

And all those faces, grimacing because of the cold, all those pale restless faces, coping as well as they can with the pollution that stings your eyes and burns your throat. All those people who prepare themselves for the year-end celebrations because it has to be done, and not because they find pleasure in it. All these compulsive consumers walking around like zombies with arms full of bags filled with chimeras. All those people holding on to their portable telephones as they would to a walking stick or an iron ball and chain. A terrifying spectacle of a city without life, overflowing with billboards showing happy families around a computer, or young women "anorexically" thin and advertising the benefits of a brand of yoghurt.

I criss-crossed through the city with an aching heart. I looked, in vain, for a calm, human place. Then I let myself be invaded by nostalgia, of a past life where everything seemed so different to me. I grew up in Paris, I would grow older somewhere else...



### Back to life

When we arrive at the Chennai airport at eleven o'clock, the temperature outside is 28 degrees. The conveyor belt brings round our gently rocking suitcases as if lulled to sleep by the steady creaking. Dust has gathered about everywhere in the nooks and corners of the big hall. Old Ambassador cars flood the parking lot. Some dogs run here and there in search of an old biscuit, the rhythm has slowed down, people don't run, they walk quietly. The taxi drivers with the help of porters take care of filling their boots. We discuss the fare. Three hours later, half-asleep, we find ourselves at Auroville, in the forest. A sweet smell of eucalyptus tickles our nostrils, the starry night watches over us.

It is such an immense joy to see once more the cows sleeping at the roadside, the teashops with film music blaring from a transistor radio, the greens, the fuchsia-pinks, the reds, the blues, the yellows jumping into our eyes, the people looking lively and aware. Smiles come our way naturally. The peacocks are coming to claim their morning rice. Nature is resplendent. The earth is redder than ever. I have the impression of feeling alive again. I rediscover the sweet sensation of walking barefoot and the pleasure of covering my feet in mud. Here we don't breathe the same way. Here we settle down gently, quietly, time warps, extends.

Life picks up again. Yet I still have this nostalgia that sticks to me, for I am an exile. With time, will I learn to transform it into a sweet memory, perhaps?

Emilie

## In brief

### Lighting a lamp together

As a prayer for the new millennium, a two thousand light mandala illumined the unfinished structure of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture on New Years Eve. A message specially taped for the occasion by His Holiness the Dalai Lama was played.

### Music of the hands

One sees only the blur of the hands as they beat out a frenetic rhythm on earthen drums. Now fast, now slow, now including the jingle of bells or clanging of brass bowls, now discarding one percussion instrument to pick up another, now exchanging theatrical glances as one drummer challenges another, the four-member band of Adi Shakti held the audience in its thrall with their performance of improvisations on Koodiyatham at Bharat Nivas one December evening.

Koodiyatham is a traditional theatre form from Kerala. The Adi-Shakti group, headed by Veenapani Chawla, is based near Auroville and has been experimenting with Koodiyatham for the past two years. The performance at Bharat Nivas is actually a part of a longer theatre piece that the group is still working on.

### Soil from the world

AuroSatprem, a specialist in earth construction, is appealing to people to bring samples of soil from countries they visit back to Auroville. He will use them for his work, but he also wishes to collect them as a testimony to human unity—a reference to the inauguration of Auroville at which soil from many different countries and Indian States were deposited in an urn.

### A Blast from the Past

"A Blast from the Past", a concert by Eliane and Liane (vocals) with well-known songs from the 70's and 80's brought many young and older Aurovilians up on their feet, dancing happily together at the Visitor's Center. They were well accompanied by Mat (sax and keyboard), Rolf (guitar), Franco (bas guitar) and Suresh (percussion).

### Nature Collage

Termite earth, sand, red soil, clay, pebbles, shells, coconut rope and silk cotton are the materials Erika uses to create her nature collages. Her recent exhibition 'Nature Collage' at the Visitor's Center was a clear demonstration that she loves everything from nature, especially the red laterite soil. Roots, branches and wood pieces were turned into mobiles, and finely polished pieces of bone, coconut shell and teak wood were made into ear studs - "my cannibal look", as Erika grins with pieces of bone and wood sticking out of her ear lobes.

### Exhibition of Tanjore paintings

"Old Gods for a New Millennium" was the name of the January exhibition in Pitanga of colourful Tanjore paintings (for more information about this particular art of painting see AVToday #128) by Jocelyn and others, some of them in elaborately carved wooden frames.

### Osmose concert

'Osmose', starring Olga (lead vocals), Mayeul (vocals and bass guitar), Julien (vocals and guitar) and Nico (percussion), gave a well-appreciated rock concert in the Youth Centre on Saturday night January 15th.

### Fire Acrobats

Sunday night, January 16th. Witnessed by a thumbnail moon and a large audience, children acrobats showed their skills whirling fire torches while dancing on complicated drummed rhythms within a circle of fire against the background of the eucalyptus grove on the Certitude-Matrimandir road.



# "It was a turning-point in my life"

## Selvam visits Findhorn

Last year Selvam, whose parents are from a local village and who was born and brought up in Auroville, visited the Findhorn Community in Scotland as part of the Poitevanga project (see box on page 6). He had never been out of India before...

"It was 28th December. I had been standing on a small Scottish railway station for half an hour waiting for someone to take me to Findhorn. I was alone, nervous and very cold. Finally I walked over to a guy who I'd watched cleaning snow off his car for the last twenty minutes. 'Are you Robin?' 'Yes. Are you Selvam?' I mean, what was he expecting? I don't exactly look Scottish..."

"He took me to Cluny Hill, one of the residences of the Findhorn Foundation where I had a place to stay. 'Come and have dinner,' he said. I walked into this big dining room and everybody turned and stared as if they were shocked to see me. I hated it. I felt so alone, and some of these people looked so big. I thought, what are they going to do to me?! I sat down, but I couldn't eat the food. All I wanted was to go back to India immediately."

### Homesick

"I had this feeling for weeks. I was so tense, so homesick. They kept trying to help me but I kept withdrawing."

"I joined an Experience Week, which is a kind of introduction to Findhorn. The first thing was they wanted me to hold hands. I felt, ugh! 'No,' I told them. 'We don't do this in Auroville.' They were OK with this. Then we all had to choose a regular work. They wanted to put me in the garden—but it was freezing outside! I told them 'No way. I'll work in the kitchen instead.' 'Why?' 'It's warm...and I like food!' 'Selvam!!' But they let me do it."

"Towards the end of that week, they asked me to give a talk about Auroville. I suddenly realized that I'd never done this before and that I knew NOTHING. I really felt ashamed. I went straight to my room and read through the books on Auroville and Mother and Sri Aurobindo that I'd brought with me. It was the first time I'd really read them. I was very nervous, but the talk went well."

"The next course I joined was called 'Exploring Life'. All the participants said what they wanted to explore, then we put all the suggestions together and planned the course. Somebody in the group wanted to talk to trees. I



said, 'No way, man. This is pure bullshit. If anybody back home hears about this, they'll really laugh at me.' But then the focaliser told me something which really changed me. He said, 'Look, if you don't try it first, you'll never know what it's like. If you don't like it after you've tried it, fine, but give it a chance.' So I tried and discovered the tree really has life. It was amazing, but scary."

### Easy on the spices!

"The next thing I did was enter a programme for long-term guests. Here you take up a regular work in the community. They asked me if I would work in house care. I said no, no. 'Give me anything, even gardening, but don't make me clean windows, bathrooms and toilets'. So they let me stay in the kitchen. By now I was really

enjoying it. In Auroville I'd always thought that cooking is for girls: when I arrived in Findhorn I couldn't even make a cup of tea! But I learned to make lasagne, many different salads, and all kinds of Indian meals (my sister sent me recipes). This is a big thing for me. At the end I was even focalising part of the Friday night meal, the most important meal in the week because this is a party night for departing guests. The only thing I was told was to go easy on the spices. 'We don't want people crying when they leave this place.'

"One thing I learned there was that you should not prejudge or be afraid of doing any job. Even managers there take turns cleaning the bathrooms. In the end, I even did house care. On one of my final days I was collecting garbage around the house. I put my hand in a bush and pulled out a beer can. And then I realized that it was my can, the can I had thrown there six months before when I arrived! I thought, 'I didn't care a damn then, and now I'm cleaning up my mess. It's like life. What you do always comes back...'

"The other really important thing I learned was to trust my own thoughts. Before I went to Findhorn, I always listened to my parents and did whatever they wanted me to. Now I've learned to think for myself. It was like I was brought out of the dark to discover who I am."

Being outside Auroville was really a turning-point in my life. Before I didn't have the confidence to talk with people freely, but now I can communicate much more easily. I saw how committed people were to working over there, and I realized that sometimes I have wasted my time here. I've made many new friends from all over the world: without friends, no life! When I left I cried—normally I never cry."

*From an interview with Alan*

## Around Auroville

# The Spiritual Significance of Flowers

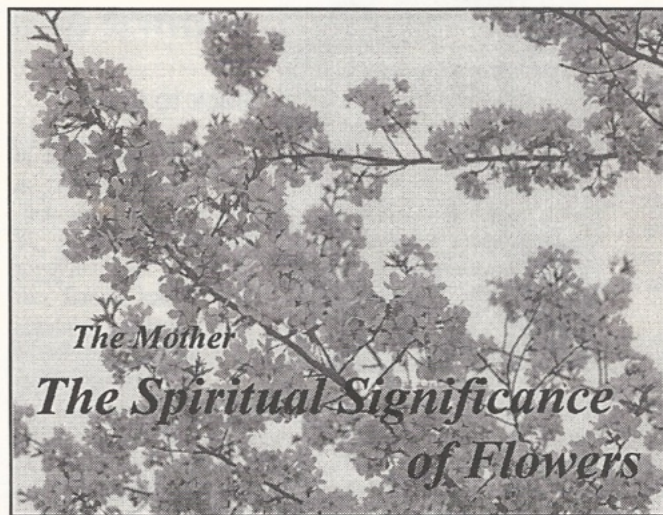
## Book Preview

"Flowers can directly transmit into the psychic all that they contain, pure, unalloyed. They possess a very subtle and very deep power and influence." (The Mother)

In The Mother's life flowers played a special rôle. She once explained that each flower symbolises an aspect, an emanation, an aspiration and a progress in the evolution of the earth. By entering into contact with a flower one can sense its unique quality, its inner meaning. Botanical or common names very rarely convey that meaning. Mother gave flowers spiritual names and used them as an effective language to convey messages. She used to arrange over a hundred flowers for one hour each morning, mindful of all those to whom later that day she would give particular flowers so that they might develop the Divine qualities the flowers symbolise.

In 1973 the Sri Aurobindo Ashram published *Flowers and their Messages*—a book containing the botanical as well as The Mother's names of over 800 flowers, illustrated with 117 drawings. The book was repeatedly reprinted. This spring, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram will issue a new book containing the Mother's significances for 898 flowers, organised by theme, with 630 colour photographs, in English, French and German editions. Auroville Today spoke to Lilo Burk, an Ashramite who is the book's editor.

Lilo: "The idea to publish a flower book with colour photographs arose more than thirty years ago, in 1969, during a discussion between Richard Pearson of our Ashram and Narad, the Aurovilian who started the Matrimandir Nursery. Through Tara Jauhar they conveyed the idea to the Mother. She asked, 'Will it be a big book? Will all the photographs be in colour?' The Mother seemed happy. But the proposal didn't work out then for some reason."



"When Narad left Auroville, he gave his notes and flower slides to Richard, who later passed them on to the Archives. Some work was done but when I inherited the project in 1985 I realised that I had to re-do a lot. Narad's photos had deteriorated, the notes were incomplete. So I more or less had to start from scratch, and learn botany, photography and layout work in the process."

### Many years of work

"After reading what I could about the flowers named by the Mother, I went out looking for them. I visited the gardens in the Ashram and Auroville, located the flowers and tried to find out when they would bloom. When I had doubts about the identification of a flower, I took it to

Richard, who has a lot of botanical knowledge. He had also helped to collect the flowers Tara took to the Mother in the late sixties. At the time Mother would either re-confirm the names of flowers she had previously given or rename them, and give the spiritual meanings of new flowers. She also made a comment on almost every meaning."

In the beginning a couple of people helped to photograph the flowers, but they gradually dropped out. Fortunately Walter, the landscaper of the Matrimandir gardens who is also a fine flower photographer, came to my aid. We started photographing and gradually he taught me how to use the camera. Then for several years Bob Zwicker (of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives) and I cycled out to Auroville or to the Ashram gardens every week. I did the photography; Bob held the sun reflectors and provided moral support. It was a great challenge to our patience, standing in the sun with the camera ready to shoot, while gusts of wind shook the flowers or passing clouds blocked out the sun. This continued until our photo collection was nearly complete. At the same time I started collecting quotations from the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works. These quotes go along with the significances for a greater understanding of their meaning."

There are about 16 photos missing. We simply could not find the flowers! For example, there is "Effort towards the truth" (*Wormia bourbridgii*). I knew only one bush. When I went out to photograph it, the flower was not in bloom. When I came back, the bush had died and I have never managed to locate another plant. And then, of course, there are flowers that belong to the same family but have different colours, and are named differently. There was no need to photograph each colour, and this explains why there are 630 photographs but 898 descriptions."

The last challenge was the layout and the book's arrangement. We got a new Mac computer at our office and I learned the layout programme. Then for five years there were no more blue skies, green meadows and lovely flowers, but only a drab computer screen. I spent endless hours arranging the layout and entering the corrections—in three languages!

We also wanted to find a new arrangement for the book, something more than a flower catalogue. One day, sitting at the Samadhi, I suddenly "saw" the book in twelve chapters. The members of the team later refined this order. The first chapters deal with the Divine, the remaining chapters with planes of consciousness and parts of the being, and it concludes with a chapter on Radha and Krishna. In this way the book can be read as a sadhana; it will give you a new way of entering into Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga."

*In conversation with Carel*

**The Spiritual Significance of Flowers**, 462 pp (324 pp main text, 138 pp index, glossary, descriptions). Will be available from SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002, e-mail address: sabda@auroville.org.in. Approximate price in India: Rs 2000.

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