

Auroville Today

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The hidden world of *ammam*s

In a candid conversation eight *ammam*s from two Auroville communities open a window onto their world and what it means to work in Auroville. *Ammam*s, literally 'mothers', are, in Auroville parlance, female household and community workers.

WATER COLOUR BY VAHULA



This is not easy. At first, shyness prevails when questions are asked: about their work, their relationship with their employer, about Auroville. Then one of them throws caution to the wind and starts speaking openly. With increasing courage, the others join in. And soon the discussion gets lively and touches not only Auroville and their work, but their lives in the village.

Their day starts, on average, at four in the morning. This is the time they have for themselves, when the men folk and the children are still asleep. It's time for some personal care. A short while later, they go to the community tap to collect water – if they're lucky, there isn't a long queue of other women. Back home, they light the firewood stove, and the cooking begins: breakfast and lunch for all. Soon the husband will wake up, and his tea must be ready. By seven, the children are prepared for school. Shortly afterwards the *ammam*s cycle to their work (a journey of up to an hour), which starts at eight or half past eight. The cycles are loaded with their tiffin of food and, often, the family's laundry, which they do during their lunch hour. Few Auroville employers object (some Auroville communities have even collective washing places) as they are aware of the water shortage in the village and the fact that, if the laundry isn't done during lunch break, the *ammam*s would have to do it in the evening.

After their Auroville work is completed, the *ammam*s cycle home. Then comes the cleaning of the house, the cooking of dinner, looking after the children and all the other household chores – the men never do work in their homes. The *ammam*'s day normally ends at ten or eleven.

Another world

They compare the interaction with the

Aurovilians to entering another world. All the *ammam*s come from villages around Auroville, though not all were born here. "Some of us got married off to husbands who come from here," says Bhagyam. Of the eight *ammam*s I spoke to, only two had some schooling and could read and write Tamil; Gowri in her early twenties, and Pattammal who had the opportunity to study at New Creation bilingual School. Pattammal is the only one who can converse and read and write in English.

So how do they get along with their employers? A burst of giggles follows. "Oh, we manage. We understand what they say. Some *vellakaras* (foreigners) even speak a bit of Tamil." More giggles. Obviously, the Tamil spoken by the non-Tamil Aurovilians could do with some improving. But are the women motivated to learn English? Yes and no. Classes are being offered in Pitanga for *ammam*s and gardeners, but only the men attend. "We are too busy," says Kumari. "We have to work here as well as at home, while the men have nothing else to do." But some probing reveals they are afraid of entering the classroom and showing the men their ability to pick up another language.

Differing expectations

For an *amma* the move to Auroville is usually momentous. It is not the work, but the different expectations they have to get used to. "Work is part of a Tamil girl's life from the time she is very young, especially if she is from a poor family," says Maragatham, who is in her mid forties but appears much older. "We all have learned to understand quickly after being told just once how to do something. That's why most *ammam*s, even if they come to Auroville to work for the first time and do not understand the language, pick up work easily."

Sometimes they confront radically different expectations from their employers. Like what? The

unanimous answer is noise. "*Vellakaras* are very sensitive to sound," says Pattammal. "They don't like it when we work noisily, or speak too loudly, for example when we do the laundry. For us noise is never a problem; we can do anything, even sleep soundly, when there is thunder outside!" The discussion shifts to temple music that, during festival times, blares from village loudspeakers as early as 4 a.m. "We have heard that the *vellakaras* are very annoyed by such loud music, but it doesn't really affect us. We've grown up with it," they say.

Kumari, who has been working as an *amma* for over 6 years, gives another example of a different cultural pattern: harsh judgements. "When I first started my job, I noticed that the lady of the house had kept some pebbles on a table. One time as I was cleaning, a pebble rolled off and fell on the floor. 'Stupid!' she said, and I was very upset by that response. I thought to myself, 'After all it is a stone and nothing is broken, then why should she be so harsh?' Since that day, I made a firm resolve – never to do any cleaning in the house when she was around." The others nod in agreement; and admit that they too follow a similar policy. "I get so tense that I may disturb my employer that sometimes even my legs begin to shake and I can't move!" says Shankari. The others laugh.

What do they know about Auroville and why so many *vellakaras* came to this place? It appears that there is little knowledge about Auroville. None of them have ever visited the Matrimandir. "Of course all of us have seen it as we come to work," says Shankari. How about special gatherings and bonfires at the amphitheatre? "No, there is no time for that. Perhaps our children have been to those, but we have our village festivals to observe, many with strict fasting, prayers, and cooking. Plus on the days we are off, we spend the time with our family and relatives."

Even *Sangamam*, the yearly celebration that Auroville organizes for the workers, is not well-attended by the *ammam*s. "Only the men go for those functions; they bring the rest of the family along, but not us." Shyness may also be something that keeps them away. "In these functions, there are so many strange people we do not know," says Kumari. Would it make a difference if their Auroville employers came along? There are some giggles but, says Kumari, "it would help."

Colonial attitudes?

There is sometimes a discussion in Auroville about the 'correctness' of employing people to do one's housework, something The Mother was opposed to, instead of doing it oneself. Having a househelp is seen by some as 'colonial'. But the *ammam*s are quick to disagree. "I am not educated," says Shankari. "And it's only because of this job that I am able to live with dignity, provide special things for my children, and have some respect in my village. If we were not allowed to do this job, what would we do?" The other *ammam*s speak out as well. All of them, it appears, are fighters and survivors. Most have picked up several skills along the way in a varied job history in Auroville. Some have worked in craft units, a few have developed cooking skills in a community kitchen. "But we prefer to take care of a house," they say. "Outside work might pay more, but it offers less in terms of social environment and security," Meenambal explains. "The women who take up work in a unit are generally those who don't like to work in someone else's home or whose family don't permit it."

Maragatham adds another perspective. She feels that Auroville is obliged to employ her because it bought the land that belonged to her husband's family. "I got married into a family in Kottakur which sold all its land to Auroville in the early days. Then 20 years ago my husband passed away, and the family responsibility fell on me – I had to take care of my in-laws as well as my children, and there was no land to feed us. So this job is helping my family out."

Employment conditions

Asked about the employment conditions, the *ammam*s answer that the current wages – the minimum is Rs 65 a day for a 'beginning' *amma* – could do with some improvement, apart from the yearly increase of about 5%. For, in quite a few cases, the salary of the *amma* runs the entire household. But all of them are very smart when it comes to managing their salary. They join the *sangham*, or small savings scheme in their village. "All of us belong to one *sangham* or another," says Meenambal. She explains that the concept of *sangham* has become very popular in all of their villages.

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Over the 18 years of its existence, Auroville Today has covered many aspects of village life and Auroville's relationship with the villagers. But we have never focussed upon those who provide a much-valued service in many Aurovilians' homes – the household '*ammam*s'. Here we learn something of their lives, their aspirations, and how they view both their work and Auroville in general.

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Survey of female household workers in Auroville

An in-depth survey of the workers of Auroville (commissioned by SEWA) was carried out by Professor S. Gunasekaran, Head of Dept. of Sociology, Pondicherry University in the year 2000. A total of 3709 workers were questioned on many different topics. Of these, 307 were female household workers. (referred to as 'respondents' below)

EDUCATION

Passed 10th standard:	2.6%
Passed 9th standard:	7.0%
Passed 8th standard:	6.8%
Passed 5th standard:	11.0%
Illiterate, didn't attend school:	59.0%

MARITAL STATUS

Married: 76%	Unmarried: 11%
Widowed: 11%	Separated: 2%

IMPORTANT DECISION-MAKING IN FAMILY

Respondent is head of household: 45%
Husband is head: 42%

Of the married respondents: 14% take such decisions on their own, 82% through discussion with family members, and 4% leave them to the head of the family.

Of the unmarried respondents: 12% take independent decisions, 73% by discussion and 15% leave important decisions to the head of the family.

Of the widows and separated women: 38% take independent decisions, 50% through discussion and 12% leave them to the head of the family.

Important decisions taken independently by respondent: 18%

Through discussion with family: 77%

WORKING HUSBANDS

54% of the respondents have working spouses.

If the husband is working, how much of their salary do the respondents hand over to the husband?

All: 47% Part: 17% None: 36%

How much salary do the respondents hand over to a non-working husband? All: 93% Part: 7%

WORK

Type of work:

Permanent: 35%

Temporary: 47%

Hours per day worked:

8-9 hours: 79%

4-5 hours: 12%

Average wage: Rs 1042 per month (year 2000).

Respondents who received support from their employer: 87%. Support includes gifts, travel allowance, money for children's education, help with house construction etc. Female household workers are more than twice as likely to receive such help as female workers in other areas of work (i.e. those working in units).

ATTITUDES TO AUROVILLE

What do they like about Auroville?

Peaceful environment: 88%

Good employment possibilities: 62%

Villages have developed due to Auroville 29%

WHAT THEY DISLIKE ABOUT AUROVILLE?

Low salary: 62%

Job impermanency: 56%

Cultural difficulties: 42%

(Note: Cultural difficulties could mean imposed dress-codes, ways of having to address people, inappropriate behaviour etc.)

PERCEPTIONS IN THE VILLAGE

Has their status in the village changed as a result of Auroville's employment?

Higher: 49% Unchanged: 38%

How working in Auroville perceived in your village?

Good: 73% Bad: 8%

Are they aware of Auroville outreach programmes in the villages? Yes: 57% No: 43%

ATTITUDES TO THEIR WORK IN AUROVILLE

	Poor	Fair	Good (%)
employer/employee relationship	5	26	66
clean place	3	21	75
safety	12	29	58
wages	38	40	22
reward system	34	24	8
training	35	23	8
creativity	42	11	5
further learning	42	9	4
new skills	43	10	2
medical benefits	26	34	23
promotion avenues	56	9	0.3
leave	27	33	31

(Note: The above percentages do not add up to 100 because some respondents did not reply and are classified as 'don't know')

(These figures have been compiled with the help of the Social Research Centre, which coordinated the above survey along with SEWA.)



An amma creating a complex kolam at the entrance of the home where she works.

PHOTO: PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

A newcomer and her amma

When I first came to Auroville one of the strangest things for me to get used to were the ammas who worked in people's houses.

In England the concept of a 'cleaner' or 'domestic' is still often an uncomfortable one, as it is associated with the upper classes, or the idle rich.

At first, I was surprised by the cleanliness and order of Aurovillian's houses and the crispness of their ironed shirts. Was this a sign of spiritual advancement, or did they just like to live simply and loved doing housework?

Only when I saw ammas sweeping and dusting and washing did I realize how such a high standard could be maintained in this hot and dusty place.

I had always belonged to the 'It's quicker to do it yourself' school of thought, so for the first few weeks I did everything myself, though several ammas did come knocking on the door, looking for work.

However, I quickly realized that living in a sea of red dust and windows with no glass, the British weekly session with the vacuum cleaner would not suffice. Poochies on wings and scuttling legs would suddenly invade us for left-over crumbs and I would have to spend an hour squashing and sweeping. I soon learnt the only solution is a rigorous daily cleaning schedule, for which I have no time.

I admitted defeat and got an amma who comes for a few hours in the mornings. Luckily she has been well trained by a former Canadian neighbour who had very high standards. So Radha started coming to my house.

To have someone doing things in the house for me was a completely new experience. At first I found it rather embarrassing to be the Lady of the House. I had to learn how to explain what needed doing and then actually show her how to do it, and then maybe check with her to see if she had done it correctly. I felt she really appreciated this and it gave her confidence, although at first I thought she might think I was patronizing her. Her English and my Tamil were scant, so I had to be very precise and leave nothing to her imagination. If I did it could be disastrous. For example, if I asked her to just sweep upstairs, she would nod anxiously, then I would see her sweeping the leaves in the garden. Of course, you cannot leave her notes of instructions if you happen to go out, as she cannot read English; actually I don't know if she can read Tamil, and I definitely can't. I have developed a plan for such situations. If I want her to clean upstairs I leave the brush pointing up the stairs; if it is a polishing day I leave a cloth and the pot of red polish on the

floor. It usually works.

I was not clear what her duties and limitations were. Would she mind if I asked her to sew some buttons on, paint the door or weed the garden? She never refused anything, just came out in a sweat of anxiety, wanting to please. We really want to please each other, and I think we both try very hard.

I know nothing about her life, where she goes on her bicycle when she leaves here, what her living and family situation is, what are her hopes and fears for the future or what she thinks of me and my way of life. She knows nothing about me and my family, though she loves looking at photos of my family in England. Maybe she wonders why I am living here when I could be in a big city. Maybe she doesn't, I'll never know. Actually, it doesn't matter as we somehow spend hours together in companionable silence.

At first I found it very strange to have someone moving around the house on such intimate terms. She would move my books and notes, pick up my underwear, but this was all compensated for by the freedom it gave me from the constant sweeping and washing. The first time I found her sleeping on the kitchen floor I thought she had died there, having never seen anyone sleep on a kitchen floor before.

As I am unfamiliar with Tamil customs, holidays suddenly seem to happen: Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Diwali, Saraswati puja, special political days and gods' birthdays. She also has days off for weddings, funerals and the occasional village commotion or murder. Then Radha is not seen for a few days, but this is fine with me as this is her culture and her country.

I have become very fond of Radha who has become a big part of my life here. She helps me in so many ways I am sure she is completely unaware of. She gives me a connection with the Tamil people (she invited me to her wedding) and lets me practice my Tamil on her and make her laugh. I hope I do not offend her too much with my ignorance of her ancient culture. After all, I am a guest in her country and I would find life much more difficult without her colourful presence in my house.

Dianna

(continued from page 1)

"There are hundreds of these groups made up of 16 to 20 ladies," she explains. "We join together and put whatever we save from our weekly salaries into a common pool. This becomes the 'bank', and when one of us needs money for some emergency, she can borrow from this. And we charge a very low interest of 2% compared to the 10% that the money lenders charge."

One area of conflict with their employers is the frequent need to take leave. "The vellakaras accept that we take leave for official festivals, but many don't understand the importance of family functions where we have to physically be present. Tamil society has many ceremonies: at birth, death, ear-piercing, puberty, marriages. We must attend those not only in our extended family but also of our friends. If we did not show up, we would antagonize our relatives and friends and that would give many problems," says Kumari. "I often

had to miss such an occasion," says Kokila. "And that really angered my husband. I had to bear a lot of bad talk afterwards." Adds Shankari, "I just tell my family that I will lose my job or that my salary will be cut - what else to do? Then they sort of understand." However, absence due to illness is usually never a problem and most employers do not cut the salary.

"Quite a few Auroville employers help out in other ways," says Margatham. "I was living in a hut with a leaking keet roof. My employer paid for a pucca house for me." The other ammas recount similar stories about being cared for by their Aurovillian employer. "There was this vellakara lady who was temporarily taking care of the house I work in; and she was the kindest person I have ever met. Once she saw that I looked unwell, and she personally took me to the hospital on her scooter and bought me medicines. Even now, if she sees me on the road, she never fails to greet me,"

says Meenambal. Almost all their employers, the ammas say, also provide interest-free loans especially when emergency expenses come up in the family.

What they like about Auroville

Are they happy to work in Auroville? The reply is unanimous. "Very much so." They all agree that it is one of the better things that has happened to them. Why? "Auroville is such a peaceful place to work in - we have mana nimmathi (peace of mind) when we arrive here to work every morning." "Here we have our own space to take care of, and we treat the houses we work in as our own houses, taking great care with things, sometimes even making kolams or arranging flowers," says Gowri. "Sometimes there are children in the house, and the job becomes even more enjoyable," adds Meenambal.

"There is job security here that is not there if we work outside. In the village,

there may be work one day and no work the next. And the regular salary that we get gives us an inner strength and confidence that we can do something extra for our children or meet a sudden expense without fear. We may take a loan, but we know we will be able to pay it back." The attitudes of their Aurovillian employers, with respect to bonuses, severance pay, the health care scheme and the pension scheme is also much appreciated. What they do view negatively is too close an intimacy with Aurovillians. "There have been a couple of instances where some amma became intimate with her vellakara employer, and even moved in with him." They mention a case where an amma was ostracized by the entire village after she abandoned her husband. But such relations between employer and employee, they say, are exceptions.

Watching the ammas go about their work, one cannot miss the special spirit of joy about them despite their circum-

stances back home. "When we meet in Auroville, we can unburden ourselves and share our difficulties." There is an openness in their conversations, and everyone knows each other's family life inside out - when their daughters are having their manjal neeru (puberty) ceremony; when there is a marriage or a death in the family; which one has the drunken husband who has beaten her the previous night; whose in-laws are difficult, and so on. It is like a sisterhood. In communities where several ammas work together, often coming from different villages and belonging to different castes and communities, it is their workplace in Auroville that brings them together. "Otherwise we would hardly have the opportunity to meet socially or interact with each other in the way we do here," says Bhagyam.

Priya Sundaravalli

(To protect identities, names of ammas have been changed.)

The new Secretary meets Aurovilians

Auroville has been without a Secretary of the Auroville Foundation since August, 2005. Now the long wait is over: Mr. M. Ramaswamy assumed office on 1st November. On the afternoon of Tuesday, 7th November, the community was invited to meet him over tea.

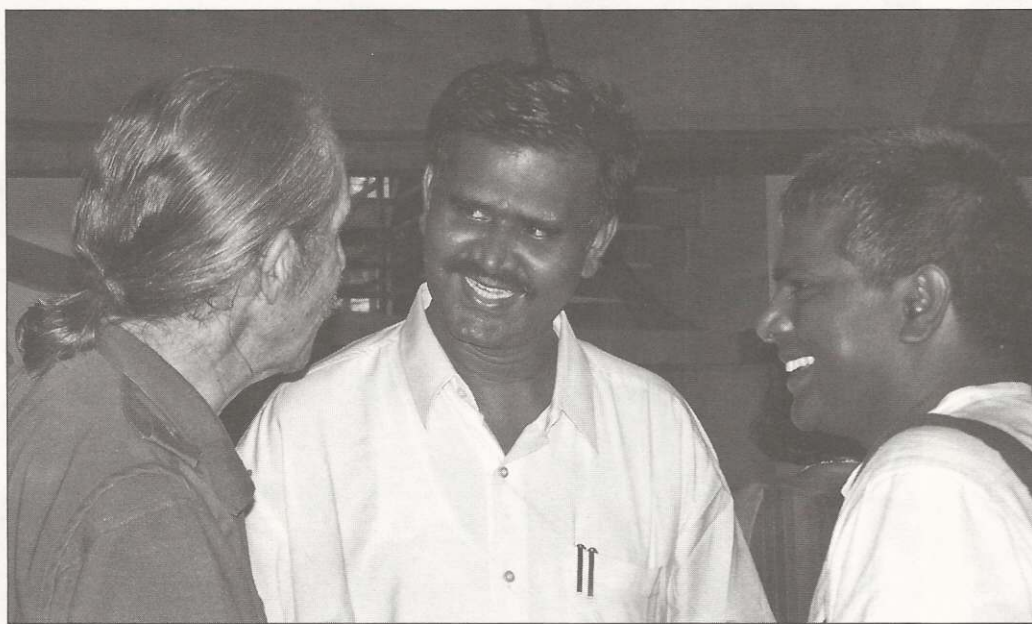
Mr. M. Ramaswamy was introduced by Mr. Bagchi, Governing Board member, who informed us that the new Secretary was born in Madras and was educated at the Christian College in Tambaram, from which he graduated with an M.A. in economics. He subsequently studied law – he is a Bachelor of General Law and Master of Business Laws – and also has a Master's degree in Business Administration. He also has a degree in astrology which, Mr. Bagchi smilingly suggested, could come in useful in terms of predicting Auroville's future.

"I was interested to take up this post," explained Mr. Ramaswamy in a short speech, "because I started my career in this district: during training I was based in Cuddalore from where I often visited Pondicherry."

When he was selected for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1982 he was allotted to Maharashtra. Here he held many senior posts, including Director of Civil Supplies and Chief Executive Officer of the State Khadi and Village Industries Board.

"My relationship with Auroville is 30 years old," said Mr. Ramaswamy. "I first visited in 1975 and I remember thinking then, looking at the red soil and scarce vegetation, that not much would happen here. When I finally revisited last March I was amazed to see all the greenery: I told Mr. Srinivasmurthy (the acting Secretary) that the Aurovilians had done great work."

Mr. Ramaswamy regretted the delay in his taking up office. "At one point, when it was not clear if I would be able to come here or not, I told Mr. Srinivasmurthy that it is all up to Mother. If She wishes me to come, I will come, otherwise not. When I heard that I was going to join, I wanted to begin work im-



The new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. M. Ramaswamy (centre), in conversation with Juergen (left) and Selvaraj.

mediately. So when I took charge on the 1st November, the same day I met the Working Committee and the Land Coordination Committee and the next day I went to meet the Chief Secretary of the Government of Tamil Nadu in Chennai" (Mr. Bagchi noted in his introductory speech, "He is a very dynamic person. He is eager to do things.")

"So let us not waste more time, let's start doing the work," continued Mr. Ramaswamy. "My intentions are very clear. I want to complete the land matters and I want to solve other problems. I will give my fullest capacity for the welfare of the Foundation and the

community but in finding solutions I want your fullest cooperation. If both of us join together we will certainly achieve our common goals."

Subsequently, in a brief interview with Auroville-Radio, Mr Ramaswamy expanded on his first task. "We want to consolidate the land-holdings in the city and greenbelt, and take that area completely under our control. This is our main priority. On that matter we are already meeting government officials."

And he concluded, "I am part of Auroville now, I am also an Aurovilian."

Alan

PHOTO: PRIVA SUNDARAVALLI

In brief

Project Funding

The Funds and Assets Management Committee, considering that large projects are likely to significantly affect many aspects of the economy and Auroville's overall development, have decided that an approval process is necessary to ensure that projects are in line with overall aims and that the budgets support our development and do not create unsustainable financial burdens.

Register of Residents

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, who has the statutory responsibility to maintain the Register of Residents as per the Foundation Act, has requested all Aurovilians to return a form to update the Register through the Working Committee for endorsement.

African Pavilion

Professor Ashenafi from the University of Addis Ababa visited Auroville in 2005 together with two of his students. The materials on Auroville they took back to Ethiopia have been used to initiate a semester project on the African area and Africa House in the International Zone of Auroville. On October 21st Brook Teklehaimanot, a young architect who graduated with a thesis on the African area of the International Zone, presented his work and the work of some of his class mates to an Auroville audience.

Diwali celebrated

Diwali was celebrated in Bharat Nivas on Friday 20th of October 2006 with fireworks and a Bharatanatyam performance by Chennai dancer Shobana Bhalchandra with her students at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas, followed by a very popular collective dinner in the Solar Kitchen.

Eco service appeal

Auroville's Eco service has requested all Aurovilians and Auroville's commercial units in particular to ensure that waste generated by them is not dumped in canyons or along roadsides by hired transport agencies. Instead it should be handed over to Auroville's Eco Service which has facilities for collection, recycling and disposal. Waste without monetary value which is not collected by the Eco service may end up being burnt in open fires and the fumes may cause health troubles to residents in Auroville.

Passings

Eli Boeuf

After suffering a stroke, 63 year old Eli Boeuf passed away on October 26th in Nallam Clinic, Puducherry. Eli, nicknamed 'the Russian Princess' because of her Russian origins, was a weaver-artist who created superbly harmonious pieces. Her body was cremated at the Auroville cremation ground.

Marguerite Smithwhite

On November 18th, Marguerite Smithwhite left her body in Puducherry. A teacher in the early days of Auroville, she returned to Puducherry three years ago and worked with some Auroville teachers to develop what she called "A new education with a soul".

ECONOMY

In search of an Auroville economic model

For several years, Auroville has been groping around for the right economic model. Although some economists think that this field of human activity possesses its own universal laws, the best ones also think that economy is 'embedded' in society, and that it can work well only when a society is living in tune with its values.

Like anywhere else in the world, two tendencies have been at work in Auroville's economy. Some believe it should be centralized and put in the hands of a representative body accountable to the community. Others think that a freer play of individual initiative - in work, investment and consumption - would be far more beneficial to the whole. But both models are imported clichés, and not an emanation of Auroville's special experience and genius.

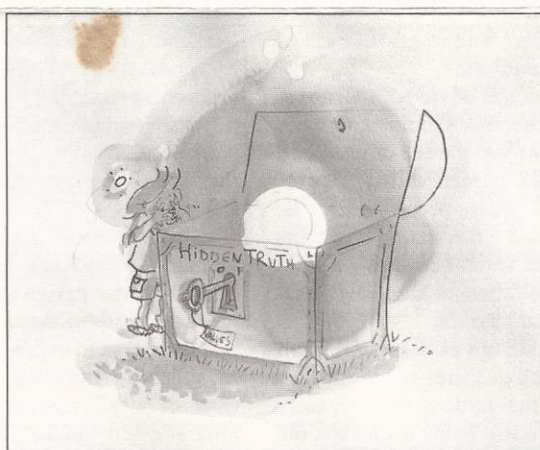
A moneyless economy?

The puzzling issue is the role of money. The Mother envisaged an internal economy without the circula-

tion of money, but the conventional experts (who are sometimes consulted in times of deep distress) have been skeptical or patronizing regarding this 'dream'. For the circulation of money play a key part in economic development. The demand, expressed in monetary terms in the market, supports production and thereby employments and, in turn, generates the taxes that feed public services.

Money seems to be the very breath of economy, its animating power, inducing work and consumption to finally resolve itself again in purely monetary terms as the surplus or profit to be invested and circulated again in the great game of life. So, is an economy without internal circulation of money possible? Some of us think so...

For what are we speaking about really when we speak of money? Money is not real wealth, only its counterpart and a symbol. It doesn't



DRAWING: EMANUELE

A development of this underlying economy, which is based on giving rather than taking, on a trust in a future which we have come together to build, is perfectly possible. In a society of 'willing servants of the Divine', it is actually the only feasible option in the long run, for the other economic models create a constant contradiction between our economic functioning and the social aspects of our project. Transitional phases can be planned as part of our collective learning

process, for we aim at the true expression of the living experience and not at an imitation of the ideal. But the overall direction is clear and unavoidable.

Now, it seems, that conditions are auspicious for the next step. For the opening of a new distribution centre (for the moment called New Pour Tous) near the Solar Kitchen has provided the opportunity to experiment with an approach which begins replacing cash with kind. Each participant deposits a certain amount in the New Pour Tous account. The New Pour Tous then takes up the responsibility of covering the basic food and some of the sundry needs of that individual.

The 250 participants value this experience as it carries a common meaning and value. The next step would be to do away with individual remunerations and to expand the range of services (electricity, water, health, telephone etc.) which are provided in kind to the members. Thus work would be definitively separated from monetary evaluation and remuneration, and would more easily find its true expression in disinterested service.

This New Pour Tous Cooperative is the first field of experimentation and study before its possible extension to all Auroville. The time is ripe to make a real step forward.

Jean-Yves

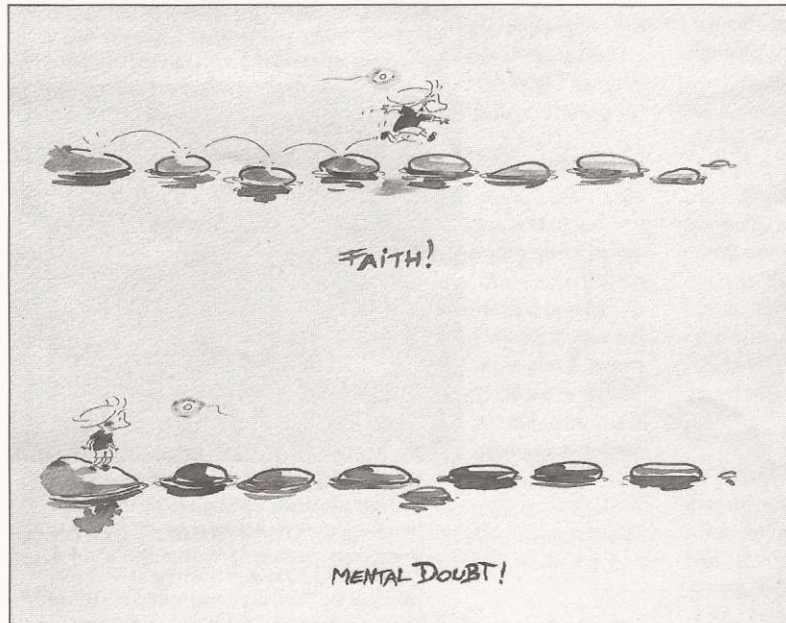
even correctly measure development, for it ignores domestic and volunteer work, as well as the ecological and human costs of a profit-oriented economy.

Wealth is created when a given society trusts its future and dares to move towards it with optimism. For then people are ready to invest and contribute in a spirit of emulation and cooperation. When confident optimism is missing, leaving only greed for short-term gains, or when the drive for self-preservation takes over the need for solidarity and togetherness, money cannot fulfill its function properly. Then you get inflation, deflation or stagnation, and speculative bubbles.

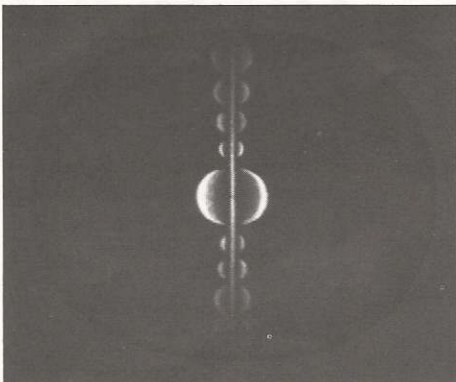
A confident optimism in the future is what releases energy and creates development and surplus to be distributed or invested. Money is simply a device used to circulate it.

In fact, all economies are based upon a foundation that is non-commercial, like work done within the family, services offered to the neighbourhood and community, and volunteer work of all kinds. This is what maintains the social fabric, and repairs what the commercial economy so often destroys. In some countries of Africa and Latin America, it is only the functioning of this aspect of the economy that prevents a total collapse of the system.

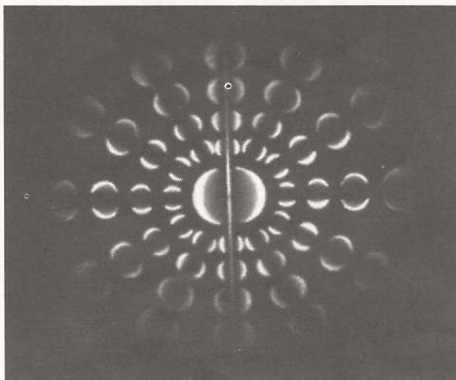
DRAWING: EMANUELE



The petal shields in the twelve meditation rooms



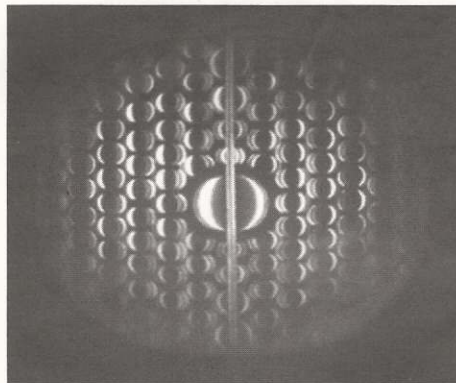
Sincerity (light blue). To become perfectly sincere, one should have no preference, no desire, no attraction, no disgust, no sympathy or antipathy, no attachment, no repulsion.



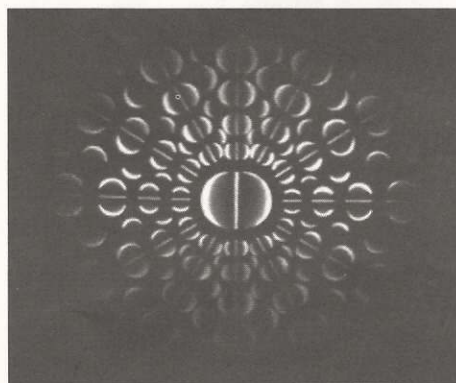
Peace (deep blue) Calm and tranquillity, a smile which does not disappoint, a deep quietude where no disturbance can come – a quietude with a sense of established security and release.



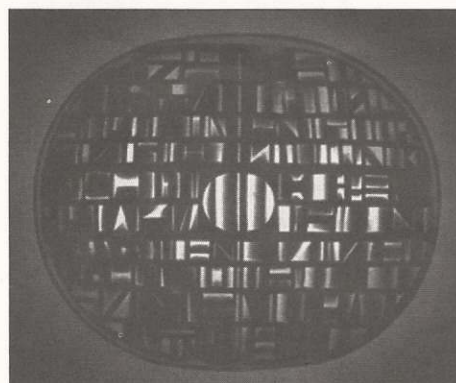
Equality (blue violet) Equal in all circumstances, keeps a perfect mastery and remains peaceful in the presence of whatever happens.



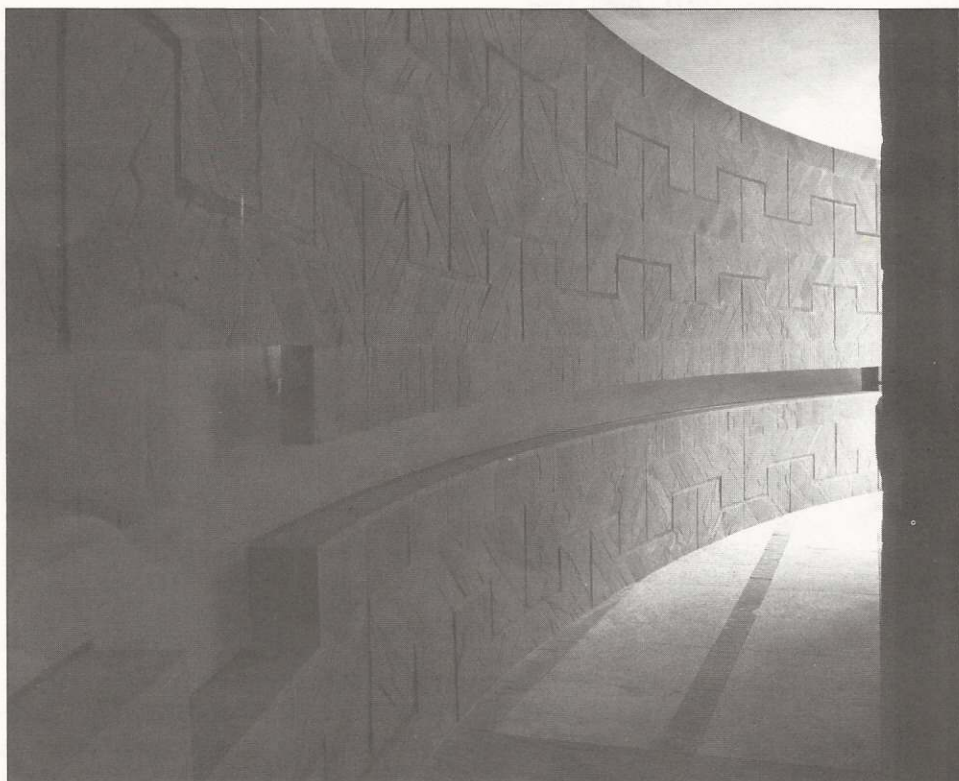
Generosity (pure violet) Generosity gives and gives itself without bargaining – gives for the joy of giving.



Goodness (reddish violet) Christ was an Avatar in the line of Krishna, the line that represented...yes, goodness, charity, love and harmony.



Courage (pure red) True courage is to be able to face everything in life without the slightest emotion in any part of the being and with a constant awareness of the Divine presence.



The corridor leading to the 'Courage' petal.

On 19th January 1972, the Mother gave Satprem a list of twelve qualities for the meditation rooms which architect Roger Anger wanted to create in the Matrimandir's twelve 'petals'. They are: Sincerity (light blue), Peace (deep blue), Equality (blue violet), Generosity (pure violet), Goodness (reddish violet), Courage (pure red), Progress (vermillion), Receptivity (orange), Aspiration (golden yellow), Perseverance (light yellow), Gratitude (light green), and Humility (dark green). Mother commented: "The first eight concern the attitude towards the Divine, and the last four towards humanity."

Matrimandir is going to surprise us. Already now, even though work on the main structure is continuing, the Inner Chamber attracts many Aurovilians for concentration - on the inner Divine or on other levels of consciousness. But what can be expected from the meditation rooms in the 12 petals? And what will each of the 12 gardens communicate?

For The Mother it was obvious. A visitor to a garden or a petal chamber should experience the specific quality of that garden or chamber. Someone visiting the garden called 'Power' should experience what power truly is. Similarly, a person meditating in the 'Aspiration' chamber should acquire a deeper understanding of aspiration on all levels - psychic, mental, vital and physical.

To envision and design gardens and chambers that express such qualities is an immense task. The work on the gardens is at an early stage and designs are still being made. But the meditation chambers in the petals will be open to the public on February 21, 2007.

Chamber designs

Two design elements express the specific quality of each chamber: its colour and the geometric patterns on the window shield. Both are the work of Auroville artist Shanta (Chantal Gowa). She began the work in 1992, fourteen years ago.

Her first task was to find the right colour, the vibration of which corresponds to the chamber's quality. After various experiments it was decided use pure, strong colours. A visitor to a chamber can now expect a colour bath - an immersion in colour as a help to understand the deeper meaning of the chamber's quality.

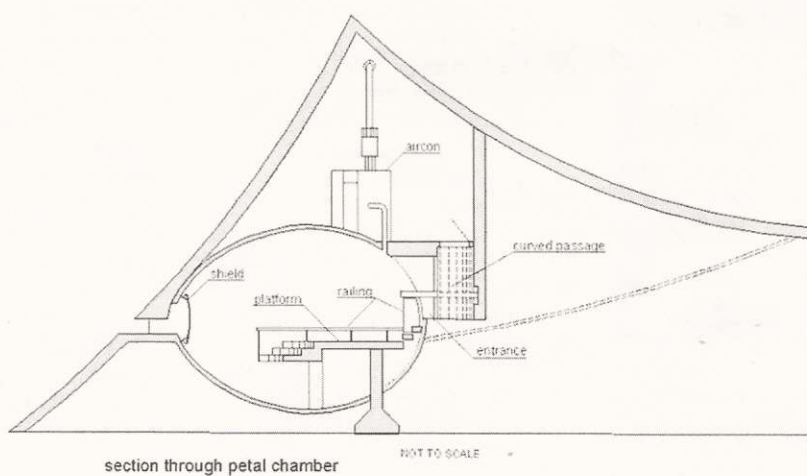
The second help to experiencing the specific quality of a chamber is the geometric pattern on its window shield, the chamber's focal point. Shanta began the process after studying Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's words that describe the specific quality of a chamber.

"The white oval was in front of me. I tried not to use my mind to conceive of the design, but instead manifest something from emptiness by simple doing," she says. "For these are not ordinary designs, but mandalas - expressions of a higher truth." Afterwards she showed her work to a group of people. If they approved, the shields were made in a factory in Bangalore.

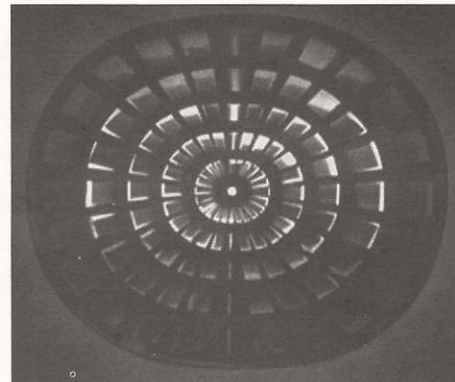
Yet, even if the group approved a design, it wouldn't always mean the end of the affair. "If I felt that the design did not agree with my inner perception, that I had not expressed all that there was to express, I would start again," says Shanta. And there were periods when the flow of inspiration stopped. This happened after she had finished the first six shields. "I felt without inspiration. A change was needed. I tried to refer myself to Mother. I prayed, asked for energy and inspiration, and gradually a new way opened up, which I followed till the end." The work on the twelve shields is now finished. Looking back, Shanta says it was an act of Grace to have been given this work.

Once the rooms are open "it's up to the Aurovilians to make use of the opportunity," says Shanta. "If we have the will to change ourselves, we have to make the step and take a bath. It can happen in a minute, when understanding dawns in a flash; it can be after long meditation that understanding grows. But the doors for change have opened and the Aurovilians can step through."

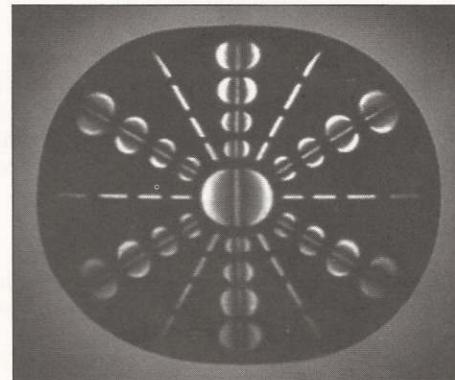
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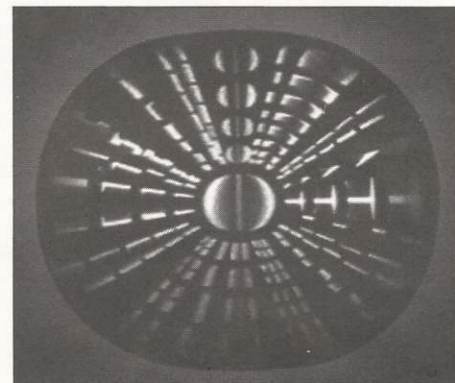
section through petal chamber



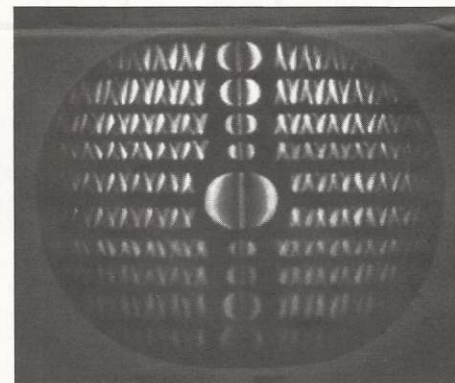
Progress (vermillion) Those who have a strong will towards spiritual progress and purification, automatically lit the fire within themselves.



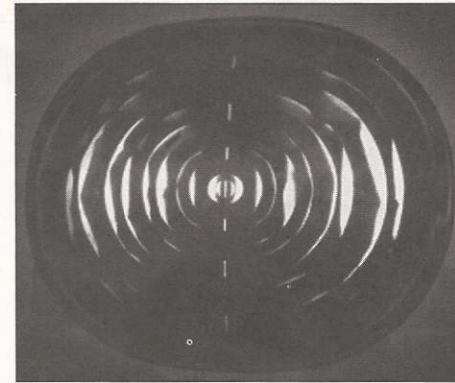
Receptivity (orange) The power to receive the Divine Force and to feel its presence and the presence of The Mother and allow it to work.



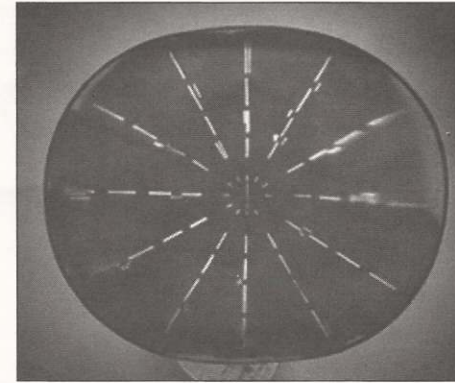
Aspiration (golden yellow) Aspiration is like an arrow... you aspire, you want very earnestly to understand, to know, to enter into the Truth. A flame that burns always, but never burns.



Perseverance (light yellow) The most essential quality is perseverance, endurance and a kind of inner good mood that helps you to not get discouraged and to face all difficulties with a smile.



Gratitude (light green) There is nothing that gives you a joy equal to that of gratitude.



Humility (dark green) Humility is the recognition that one knows nothing, and that there may be something beyond what presently appears to us as being true, noblest, most disinterested. True humility consists in referring oneself constantly to the Lord, in placing everything before Him.

Persian Sky, Auroville's healing horse

"Looking at him now, you would not think much of him," says Marianne as 'Persian Sky', her horse, nibbles on a carrot. He is a picture of tranquillity, rolling up his upper lips and showing a set of horsey white teeth. "But you should see him at the Auroville horse show when Jerome takes him on the tent pegging course. Then you would realize what a thoroughbred he is."

They make an unlikely pair – a little girl hardly 3 feet tall, pulling a half-ton beast behind her. There is an air of unrestrained delight about her as she stumbles along the sandy paddock pulling excitedly at the thoroughbred's reins. He follows docilely behind.

"Persian Sky" is his name, and the girl is Sarasu, a nine-year old deaf-mute child who attends Deepam, the day-care centre for physically and mentally challenged children in Auroville. Every fortnight, on a Friday afternoon, Persian along with his team of helpers at the Red Earth Riding School (RERS) in Brihaspathi, works with children from Deepam.

In this programme of equine therapeutics, children who have a wide spectrum of physical or mental disabilities, including cerebral palsy, autism, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder), congenital deafness and/or mental retardation are assisted by the horse and his trainers.

Now it is Sarasu's turn. She is on Persian's back now, balancing herself confidently and even standing upright for a brief moment. From the sidelines, her friends cheer at the display. She beams. Not all of them will get to ride Persian today, but it is a field trip and they appear content to just be there.

Marianne walks Persian first. Like a horse-whisperer, she speaks constantly to him, even 'whispering' in his ear. His walk is stately; long deep strides, deliberate, and majestic. "This type of walking is very relaxing," Marianne explains later. "And it is this that helps the children feel secure."

How Persian Sky found his way into Auroville and got to Marianne and her partner Jerome is a strange tale. "He was a race horse," says Marianne, "who was retired after a year on the competitive circuit." Persian, she says, was too temperamental when it came to racing. "He will not do what he does not want to do. So in the races, if he wasn't in the mood, he would deliberately come last, or even get himself eliminated!"

Luckily for Persian he was not put down, as is the fate of some race horses. Instead Inge, an Aurovilian who loves to ride, brought him to Auroville. It was the year 2000. "He was six years old at that time," says Marianne. "Later when Inge left Auroville, she passed him on to our care."

For Marianne, there was an instant connection. "I knew at once that he was special, and I felt that he had been given to me," she recalls. But the special role that Persian would play came to Marianne just 2 years ago. "I saw this book by an American who spoke about horses and their ability to work with children with disabilities."

Marianne was riveted by the idea. "This was something I had always wanted to do, and I felt, Persian was the perfect horse for this kind of work." She took a year off to study the system and prepare. Her intuition proved right. Persian seemed to have the right disposition for children with disabilities. "He seemed to have another side to his nature when it came to weak or disabled children." Both Marianne and Jerome were struck by the patient and protective nature that emerged. And so began the unique programme of Equine Therapeutics where a prematurely retired race horse found his true calling: working with disabled children.

This is a work of the heart. A lot of communication happens in silence, through sign language. It is a work that takes attention and concentration from all – the child, Marianne, Persian and the other assistants. The children are completely 'in the moment'; their eyes focussed upon Marianne as she gestures and motions. They mirror her actions sitting upon the horse. She leads them through a series of exercises – reaching up or out, she pushes them to their physical limits. "Just sitting on the horse and balancing oneself improves muscle tone," explains Marianne. "And I take each child through a set of exercises." As each child is different, Marianne subtly alters her instructions to match the needs and capacities of each.

For the past year, Marianne and her team of three run the programme: Jerome, Mahi, a returning Aurovilian who has just completed a B.A. in psychology from an American university, and Thiru, a young newcomer from Edaiyanchavadi who is currently in France. "Jerome and Thiru bring the masculine element into the programme," explains Marianne. She explains how the young boys from Deepam "seem to lose their fear and become more confident" when the men are around.

None of the four including Marianne, receive a maintenance to do this work. "We are all volunteers, and all of us enjoy doing this. Actually there is no money; just enough to maintain Persian!"

Like many things in Auroville, money for the programme has been hard to come by. "When Persian was first given to us, we didn't have a paisa for his upkeep," says Marianne with a smile. "But somehow in typical Auroville style, money always came through and usually at the very last moment!" The cost of taking care of a horse runs to about 4,000 rupees a month. Over the two years that Marianne has had Persian, she would work during the summer in Switzerland, "when it is too hot to ride here", and save up money for running the programme for the rest of



Sarasu, the 9 year old deaf-mute child, waits her turn.

the year. "But now a very dear friend of 25 years, helps meet some of the basic expenses for keeping Persian, and that is a big relief."

Four children have had their turn, and there is one more to go. This also happens to be one of the more difficult children. Suresh is spastic, and suffers from cerebral palsy. "A few months ago," says Marianne, "Suresh had much less balance while standing and walking." When his turn finally comes, Suresh rushes forward, limping with astonishing agility. His movements are jerky and uncoordinated, and his limp even more pronounced in his anticipation and excitement. But he is all smiles; a wide grin breaking from ear to ear.

Marianne realizes that a horse with Persian's background of racing (which is also a world of stress and steroid abuse) "has a life expectancy of sixteen years or so." Persian is twelve, but this reality does not faze her. "No, I am not in a rush to look for another horse to take his place. Mother has always shown the way, and I have full trust in Her." She softly adds, "Of course my ultimate dream is to have a stable of about 10 such horses in Auroville, all dedicated to this work with children. And there is such a need in this part of the world; but I am happy to take it one step at a time!"

Priya Sundaravalli

For more information visit:
www.auroville.org/society/persian_sky.htm



Vikram walks Persian Sky as Marianne looks on.

RESEARCH

Ambience Harmonizers

A new home appliance that emits charged sound-light improves the atmosphere in one's living room, claims the inventor.

Charged "sound-light"? It sounds like wacky science. "Nothing of the sort!" says Mario indignantly. He is demonstrating his 'Ambience Harmonizer', a square piece of coloured glass punctured by three LEDs emitting a blue light. "Now watch this," he says. At a distance of about a metre he points a hand-held receiver at the light. Through the receiver's tiny loudspeaker the voice of Mother sounds, repeating Her mantra *Om Namoh Bhagavate*. Turning the receiver in the opposite direction, the voice falls silent. Mario explains. "The Ambience Harmonizer contains a microchip which stores sound: a piece of music or a mantra or someone's spoken message. Another chip translates the sound-waves into the blue light-waves. The receiver retranslates this light back to sound."

So what's special? The invention itself, acknowledges Mario, is not rocket-science, though it consists of quite an unusual combination of electronic elements. The novelty is the machine's potential use. Put it in your room and leave the switch on. If you are sufficiently sensitive, you'll definitely feel a change in atmosphere. The machine is an ambience harmonizer or rather, an ambience raiser or ameliorator.

To explain the phenomenon, Mario refers to the well-known work of Japanese researcher Masaru Emoto who claims that water can store vibrations emitted by sound. "A few years ago I met Bhagawandas," explains Mario, "who heads the commercial unit Aquadyn that sells water-purifiers. Bhagawandas had read about Emoto's work and wondered if a device could be built into Aquadyn's water purifiers that would subject the water to positive sound vibrations. I suggested that he use light instead of sound." Bhagawandas accepted the proposal, Mario built the device and since then all of Aquadyn's water purifiers carry this device.

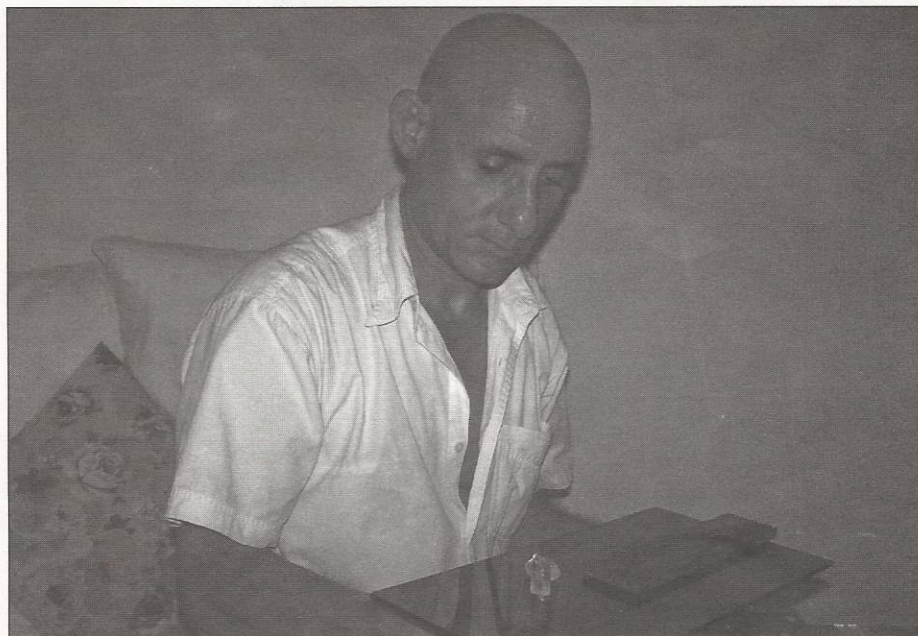
Following Aquadyn's successful application of sound-light to

charge and dynamize water, Mario took a small but decisive next step – he decided to use sound-light to charge materials other than water. "I had read a talk of The Mother to the children of the Ashram where she explains that semi-precious stones, such as amethysts, can be easily charged. And she also said that 'charging' was a matter of concentration of consciousness. So I began to wonder if the sound-light of a recorded mantra spoken by a spiritual person could be used to charge crystals. And then I went a step further: would such a 'sound light', if it is freely emitted in a room, have an effect on the atmosphere of the room and people inside?"

For the function of a mantra, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to create vibrations in the inner consciousness that will prepare it for the realisation of what the mantra carries." So he built such a device: one with three LED lights with Mother's mantra in the microchip.

Did it work?

Mario laughs. "To be honest, I'm not sufficiently sensitive so I don't feel it," he says, "and this does frustrate me sometimes." It was, however, tested spontaneously when some of Mario's more 'sensitive' friends visited him when the machine was turned on. "They sensed something immediately! The machine was in the corner of the room, emitting sound-light of Mother's mantra. My friends knew



Mario with his invention.

nothing about the experiment, had not even seen the machine, but felt something positive in the atmosphere and commented about it."

The commercial application of Mario's Ambience Harmonizers still awaits development. "The electronic components are very small and many types of machines can be built," he says, "but I'm more of a researcher than a business man." The devices can store and emit any type of music or mantras and can be made to order. The Buddhist may prefer *Om Mane Padme Hum*, Aurovilians and Ashramites may choose the *Gayatri* mantra or the mantra of The Mother. Everything is possible.

Any takers?

Carel

On the trail of Sri Aurobindo

Recently Suzie visited Alipore Jail in Kolkata where Sri Aurobindo was imprisoned for a year.

“I didn’t know exactly why I wanted to visit the place but it was a strong inner feeling,” says Suzie, referring to her recent visit to Alipore Jail. Alipore Jail is where Sri Aurobindo spent 12 months in solitary confinement, from May 5th 1908 till May 6th 1909, and which he refers to as his “Ashram in Alipore” or the ‘little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline’ in his essays published under the title *Talks of Prison Life*. The 9 foot by 5 foot cell in a special area of the prison complex is now part of the new pilgrims’ route of the various sites in Kolkata associated with Sri Aurobindo.

“It was fortuitous how it all came together,” says Suzie of this unusual visit. “I had heard of a few Aurovilians who had made the trip. But it was Peter Hechs in the Ashram who pointed me in the right direction.” Suzie got in touch with Ranjan Mitter of the vibrant Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture in Kolkata who helped her with a letter of recommendation.

“Planning the trip was not easy,” says Suzie. “I needed prior

permission from the jail authorities and had to provide two possible dates for visit.” Her appointment fell on Diwali day.

“It was just like you see in the movies. There were a lot of people visiting their relatives that day, speaking through bars. And there I was with Auroville incense and a matchbox, which was permitted, which I thought could only be possible in India!

“As I waited in Sri Aurobindo’s room, I was reminded that I was really in a functioning prison. There were all these closed-circuit TV monitors. Some of the cells some had inmates inside – it was a strange experience.”

The small windowless cell with its barred metal door through which Sri Aurobindo had a glimpse of the courtyard and the lone tree there, is no longer in use. “The room has been preserved as it was in Sri Aurobindo’s time. Only the floor has been changed from the original earthen type to mosaic, and a bench made for visitors to sit and meditate. Everything else is there; all the objects he used – two blankets, an aluminium platter for food, a bowl for drinking and washing, and a bas-

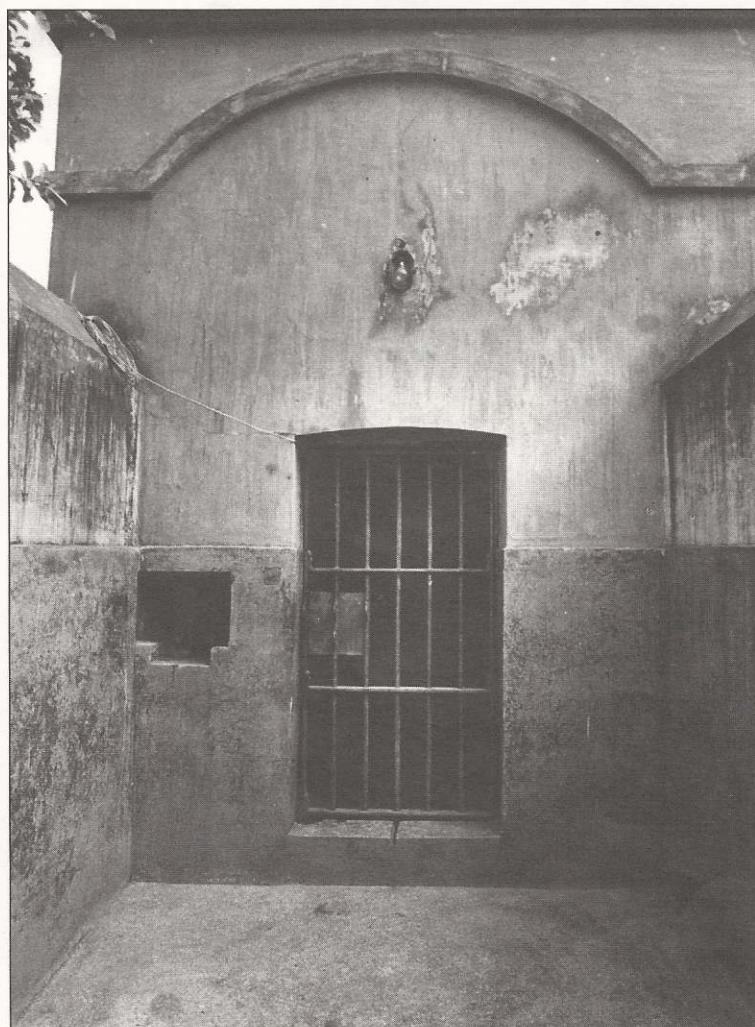
ket with its stitched leaf cover that was the toilet!”

Suzie had a few moments alone. “I went right into a deep kind of concentration and it was like being in Sri Aurobindo’s room in the Ashram.

“When I sat there, I was reminded of the suffering and sacrifices that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had made for humanity; how their bodies and minds also had to suffer and experience certain things of the human condition very intensely. Okay, now we know that he was there for just a year, but when he had went in he had no idea when he would come out.”

For those who wish to visit Alipore Jail in Kolkata but are unable to plan ahead of time, Suzie recommends an alternative. “Just visit the Sri Aurobindo Institute for Culture at 3 Regent’s Park, and there you can find an exact replica of the cell he stayed in. There is even the tree in the courtyard, a Kadamba tree perhaps because it is a favourite tree of Lord Krishna. Sri Aurobindo said that the tree with its branches was Krishna with his arms around him.”

As told to Priya Sundaravalli



Sri Aurobindo's small windowless cell in Alipore Jail with its barred door seen from the courtyard.

READERS QUESTIONS

Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo

In the October issue of *Auroville* Today an article mentioned the inauguration of the statues of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda in the Indian House of Parliament. Was there any connection between these two spiritual giants?

Swami Vivekananda influenced both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, though he never met either of them.

Sri Aurobindo took to yoga after hearing the words of Sri Ramakrishna, who was the guru of Swami Vivekananda, at a spirit session, “Mandir gado (build a temple)”. As a result, Sri Aurobindo’s brother Barin went on a search to find a suitable place to build this temple. In the course of his wanderings he contracted a ‘hill fever’, a violent and almost incurable disease, and had to return to Sri Aurobindo at Baroda. One day a *naga sannyasi* arrived at the house and, seeing Barin laid up in an emaciated condition, asked for a glass of water. Then, uttering a mantra, he cut the water crosswise with a knife and asked Barin to drink it. “Tomorrow the fever will leave you,” he predicted, and it did. Sri Aurobindo witnessed the event and wrote later, “This was a first-hand proof of yoga-power. I thought, if yoga has such powers, why not use them for the country’s sake? This was the immediate cause of my turning to yoga. Ramakrishna’s message gave the necessary push. That is why I have said that I entered yoga by the back door.”

On July 3rd 1907, the British police came to the office of *Yugantar* to arrest its editor. *Yugantar*, a revolutionary journal started by Barin, had become immensely popular and influential, particularly amongst the youth.



Swami Vivekananda

Though only a minor writer for the journal, Bhupendranath Dutt, Swami Vivekananda’s brother, came forward as the editor (in place of Sri Aurobindo) and was sentenced to jail on a charge of sedition.



Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo too was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 but acquitted. However, in May 1908 he was arrested once again in the Alipore

Conspiracy Case and was detained for a year as an undertrial prisoner in the Alipore Jail. The period was of immense importance for his spiritual development. As he wrote later: “I didn’t know about the planes [i.e. the gradations of being]. It was Vivekananda who, when he used to come to me during meditation in Alipore Jail showed me the Intuitive Plane. For a month or so he gave me instructions about Intuition. Then afterwards I began to see the still higher planes... It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything. He didn’t say ‘Super-mind.’ ‘Supermind’ is my own word. He just said to me: ‘This is this, this is that,’ and so on. That was how he proceeded, by pointing and indicating. He visited me for 15 days in Alipore Jail... He would not leave until he had put it all into my head... I never expected him and yet he came to teach me. And he was exact and precise even in the minutest details.”

In connection with Swami Vivekananda, The Mother recalled that Her first book on Indian spirituality was Swami Vivekananda’s book *Raja Yoga*. As She wrote later, “Between the age of eighteen and twenty, I attained a conscious and constant union with the divine Presence and I had done it all alone, with absolutely nobody to help me, not even books. When I found a little later Swami Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga*, it seemed to me such a wonderful thing, you see, that somebody could explain something to me! This made me gain in a few months what would perhaps have taken me years to do.”

Gilles Guigan

POPULATION STATISTICS

Auroville's population on the rise

Perhaps the most significant statistic is that, in contrast to the previous year, Auroville’s population has grown over the period November 2005 – December 2006 by 82 (or just over 4%). There are now 41 nationalities represented, of which Icelandic and Thai are new entries.

The largest increase was in the Indian population: 24. However, this represents only a 3% rise over last year (last year, they recorded a 7% rise in population over the previous year). The largest percentage rise is in the number of Israelis: an increase of 31%. Not far behind were the Koreans (25% increase) and the Swiss (19%).

Most other nationalities recorded relatively unchanged figures, although the French, who recorded a 13% drop in their population the previous year, are this year once again adding to their numbers (an increase of 18, or almost 7%). The Germans and Americans are among other nationalities which have reversed last year’s decline in their numbers. Only the Dutch and Argentinian populations have declined each year over the past three years.

In terms of a breakdown of nationalities, Indians now represent just over 40% of the total population, the French 15% and the Germans just over 12%. In other words, more than 2 out of 3 Aurovilians are now either Indian, French or German.

The male to female ratio of 87 females to 100 males is virtually unchanged over the past three years. The ratio is almost identical for adults and minors. However, the ratio of adult to minor Aurovilians has changed. Whereas it was around 100:30 in the two previous years, it has now declined to 100:27.

With bated breath we await the deep explication of these figures.

Alan

Table 1
Auroville's population by nationality
(Aug. 2004 - Nov. 2006)

Nationality	Aug-04	Nov-05	Nov-06
INDIAN	686	736	760
FRENCH	300	261	279
GERMAN	245	226	232
ITALIAN	82	85	89
DUTCH	84	77	75
AMERICAN	62	61	65
BRITISH	53	50	51
SWISS	42	42	50
RUSSIAN	36	40	41
SPANISH	32	30	32
KOREAN	25	20	25
CANADIAN	25	23	23
ISRAELI	13	16	21
BELGIAN	24	17	19
UKRAINIAN	17	15	16
SWEDISH	14	12	13
AUSTRALIAN	13	12	12
AUSTRIAN	7	10	10
ARGENTINIAN	9	8	7
TIBETAN	3	7	6
JAPANESE	3	4	4
SRI LANKAN	4	4	4
BRAZILIAN	2	2	3
DANISH	2	3	3
HUNGARIAN	4	3	3
BULGARIAN	1	2	2
COLOMBIAN	1	1	2
ETHIOPIAN	2	2	2
LATVIAN	2	2	2
LITHUANIAN	0	2	2
SLOVENE	2	2	2
ALGERIAN	1	1	1
BELORUSSIAN	1	1	1
FINNISH	0	1	1
ICELANDIC	0	0	1
IRISH	0	1	1
KAZAKH	1	1	1
NEPALI	1	1	1
NEW ZEALANDER	2	1	1
SOUTH AFRICAN	2	1	1
THAI	0	0	1
TOTAL	1803	1783	1865

Table 2
Auroville's population - gender
(Aug. 2004 - Nov. 2006)

	Aug-04	Nov-05	Nov-06
ADULTS	1390	1370	1464
males	741	728	786
females	649	642	678
MINORS (< 18 years)	413	413	401
males	221	220	215
females	192	193	186
GRAND TOTAL	1803	1783	1865

Formia welcomes Auroville International

Between October 8th and 24th, the Auroville International meeting took place at the seaside town of Formia in the Eastern Italy. Friederike reports.

Imagine the following scenario. A local council meeting in a medium-sized town in Europe. The full spectrum of political parties is represented, from left to right; the auditorium is filled to the last seat. Auroville is one of only two agenda topics. Aurovilians have been invited since Auroville has been unanimously chosen to become the official sister city of this town.

This meeting took place, some weeks ago, in Formia, South Italy. Formia is a city with a past; Cicero died there some 2,000 years ago. Traditionally a community of fishermen, Formia was moved by the great Tsunami disaster of 2004 and became involved with helping the victims, in the process finding out about Auroville. Uma and Manoj came to Formia earlier this year to present their Tsunami project, opening doors for closer contacts.

So Auroville International (AVI) was invited by the Formia council to hold its annual European meeting there, the first time in AVI history a city council took enough interest in Auroville to invite us. Warmly welcomed by the mayor, Signor Sandro Bartolomeo, and Signora Giovanna Grimaldi, the Formia council cultural attachée, we were generously hosted by the community on several occasions. Not surprisingly, the superb South Italian cuisine was appreciated, as was the rich cultural history of the region. One day of our meeting was reserved for a visit to Pompeii, the historic site in the bay of Naples that was destroyed during a catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. And, to our surprise, our tour guide was Toine, a Dutchman with a long-standing connection to the Ashram and Auroville.

On Saturday, 14th October, an international conference was organized by the Formia council on the topic of "Culture of Integration / Integration of Cultures - The

Auroville Experience". It was well attended by Formia citizens. Doudou Diène and Marc Luyckx, members of the International Advisory Council of Auroville, sat on the panel together with the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Indian Embassy in Italy, Ms. Shamma Jain, the Formia mayor Sandro Bartolomeo, Gabriele Capolino, Director of "Milano Finanza", an economic newspaper, Shankar, principal of New Creation School, and AVI president Julian Lines. The moderator was Aurovilian Sauro Mezzetti, who is president of the Indo-Italian

tributes considerably to Tsunami aid but also invites each year children from the Sahrawi refugee camps.

Ms. Shamma Jain said how encouraged people of the Southern Hemisphere were by the fact that Professor Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen bank, which provides credits for the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh, had just been awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. She also emphasized that India has always been a multicultural and multi-religious society, based on deep knowledge of the human being and its inner

with diversity. There is still ignorance and fear, refugees are seen as invaders rather than being appreciated for bringing human and cultural values to enrich their host countries. Formia's mayor added that after the Second World War, when his town was 90% destroyed, the majority of the population migrated to the US, Canada and Australia and became respected citizens of those multicultural societies.

Shankar had his own moving story to tell. As a village boy in Auroville he began by throwing stones at the *vel-lakaras* (white-skinned people). But then the foreigners' inability to deal with the basic challenges of life in their new surroundings aroused the villagers' compassion. Such compassion, the feeling of brotherhood, is a quality that has to be developed if humanity is to cope with the global changes ahead.

Marc Luyckx reminded us not to blame people who are afraid of foreigners, not to blame the dinosaurs of the dying capitalist-industrialist paradigm who still rely on the divide-and-rule strategy. We are experiencing times of major changes, he said,



The watercolour image of Formia on clay tiles presented to all delegates at the meeting.

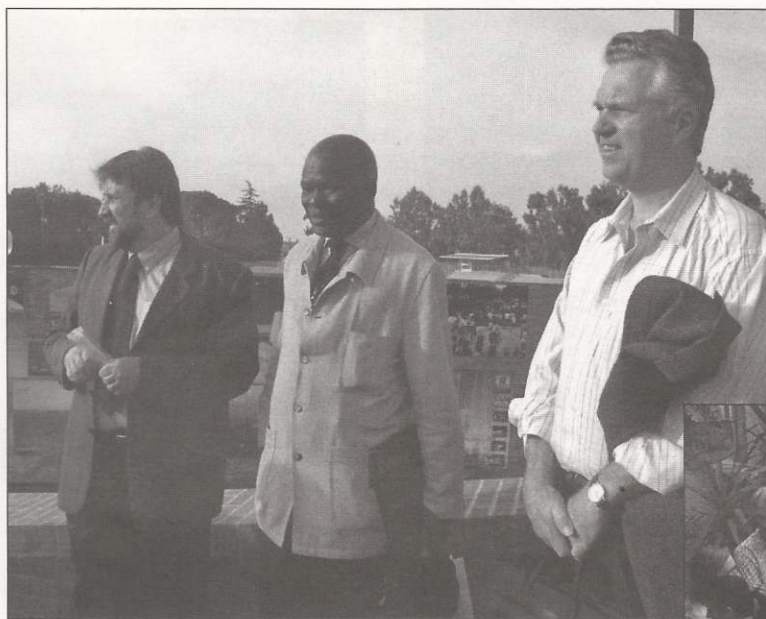
discussions focussed on the question of how to make Auroville's 40th birthday an event which would enhance the visibility of Auroville, especially with regard to the younger generation. This meeting proved that a growing number of people long for the inspiration the Auroville experience conveys. To cope with the growing need for outreach, it was decided that Auroville, the International Advisory Council and Auroville International have to have a closer relationship.

To strengthen the relationship between those attending this meeting our Auroville representative, Kathy Walkling, familiarized us with 'deep dialogue'. Deep dialogue helps create a space for something to emerge beyond the individual limited perspective, something which could be called "collective intelligence". It was a very moving and rewarding process!

Many thanks to all those who organized this very special meeting. Milie grazie, cari amici!

Friederike

For the official meeting report and for more information, please visit the Auroville website: auroville.org/organisation/avimain



Opening day at the AVI Meeting in Formia Italy: Above from left, Sauro (Auroville), Dr. Doudou Diène (International Advisory Council) and Julian Lines (AVI-USA) Right: A reunion of friends.

Chamber of Commerce.

In his opening speech Julian Lines expressed gratitude to the Formia council for the invitation. He remarked that citizens of Formia city seem to have made a big step already, away from the "homo egoicus" towards the next stage in human evolution. For Formia not only con-

reality. This, she said, has to remain a key element in any kind of progress.

Doudou Diène, who, in his function as UN special rapporteur on racism and xenophobia, had just returned from a visit to African refugee camps along the Italian coast, reminded us that humanity still has not solved the question of how to deal

changes that occur every few hundred years, and change frightens people. Instead, we should rely and concentrate on the energies of renaissance, of rebirth, as well as on the young generation which, according to Marc, has absorbed from birth the new paradigm values.

A greater part of our internal AVI



Mahakali must have a plan

Recently Tamil Aurovilian Shankar who now leads the team at New Creation bilingual School, represented Auroville at the AVI meeting in Formia, Italy. On his return, Shankar reflected upon his experiences there.

"The vibration that I felt throughout the meeting in Formia made me realise how much our Auroville community has an umbilical connection with the rest of the world. And I also deeply felt how much everyone who is concerned about global issues and problems looks to Auroville for a solution.

"Those people of Formia came to the Olympic Training Hall expecting to find the Aurovilians there with a bag full of 'ideal experiences' and 'solutions' to solve the global problems; and I don't think I exaggerate.

"Auroville, which is not even a dot on the world map, grew in front of my eyes to the size of India, Europe, Australia and the U.S. It became an immense symbol of hope. And when the International Advisory Council members, Doudou Diène and Marc Luyckx Ghisi, mentioned Auroville's existence and aims during their talks on global issues, the same symbol spread its wings like a mother hen that holds all the chicks under her wings.

"Then I realised how much the world is looking at us; and then when I looked at myself and my way of living in Auroville, my God, was I shocked.

"What does Mother Kali expect us to create on earth!

"It is only when you are outside

that you see the 'Ideal'. When you are in Auroville you are pretty much at the ground level, seeing what is going on, and just moving with that in order to 'participate' in the journey. While all those movements are okay, the question comes up - are we on the right track?

"At the AVI meeting, there were many people who attended the talks. Usually after I spoke, some of them would stop by to talk more informally, and some of the questions they raised were very deep. These are people interested in Indian spirituality. Some have read the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and are aware of Auroville through the internet. They think at least that in a project like Auroville, initiated by the Mother, people have to look at their every move and every problem with Their (Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's) support and spiritual background. And suddenly I realized - 'Oh my god; this is what we are supposed to do!'

"There were questions about our entry policy. How do we choose people? How do we know that they are coming with the Auroville ideal in mind?

"Then I looked at myself; if I was in the Entry Group - what a task! If I look at a person and said 'Hey, why do you want to join Auroville?' - and the person replies 'Just to experience Auroville,' or 'Just to try what the

Mother and Sri Aurobindo explained about Human Unity', I will have no doubt beyond that. I will say - 'Please come and do it!' This would be my answer from my experience now.

"But honestly speaking, can I open 'my' bag of experiences, and show them, saying these are my experiences? Then there is the collective experience of all the people here - can that be shown around? Are we ready with such a packet yet?

"So every day after the meeting, I would go back to my room and think and think rather than go to sleep. Whenever people asked me about Tamil Nadu, about India, about Auroville, about our practical problems - Oh my god, what could I say!

"Of course, Auroville is not a ready-made city with ample infrastructure or facilities, and life here can be tough. But at the same time we need to look into our behaviour and see what we have already got from Her and where we are heading.

"Now after returning, as I reflect upon my self and my life in Auroville, more and more questions come up: How did I enter into Auroville? What were my motivations and aspirations? What do I do for my Auroville com-

munity and how do I do it? What is my contribution to the world through my community in Auroville?

"How do I wish to be governed - should our community be self-governed or should an outside agency like the government do it for us? How do I live? How much work do I put into it and what is my involvement in my work?

"Do I live in an eco-friendly house? Am I using a non-polluting vehicle? What type of actual infrastructure and social service does Auroville provide me with? Are all our services competent enough to provide everything I need, in terms of quality and quantity, in order to

participate in the 'big' work?

"How am I going to understand the rest of the world? Will it be through the pavilions of Nations that will supposedly radiate the genius of different parts of the world?

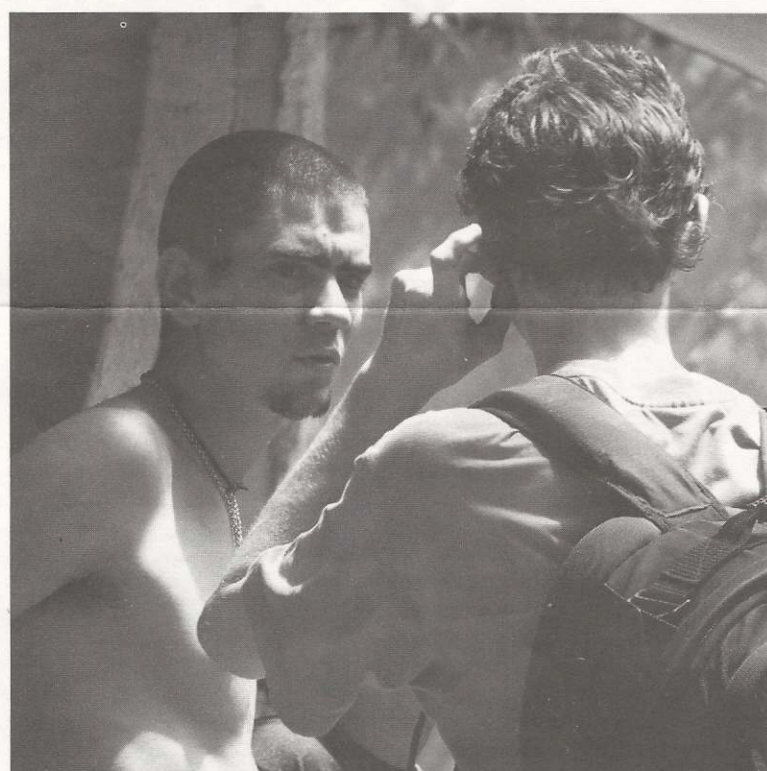
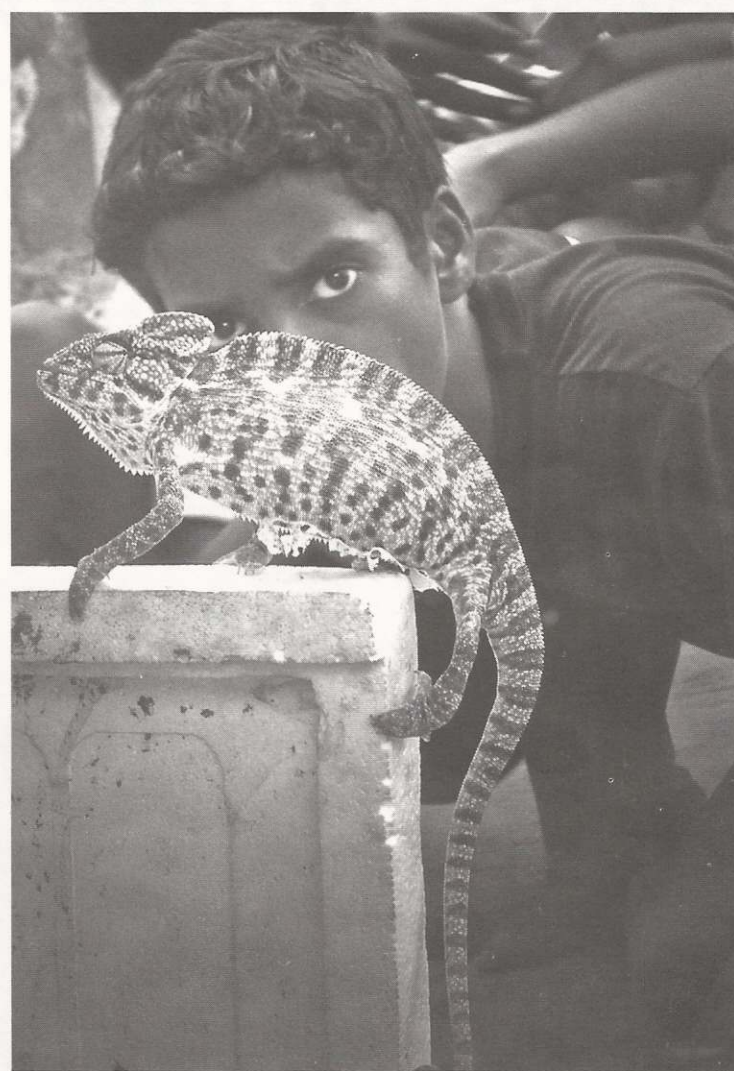
"What will my children learn in Auroville? Are they going to be encouraged in creating new and innovative opportunities?

"While the questions are endless, the answers are not easy to come by. One thing is clear - that I am confused. What is unclear is my role in this task. And one thing I assume - that Mahakali must have a plan. And if we don't do it, She will do it or us!"

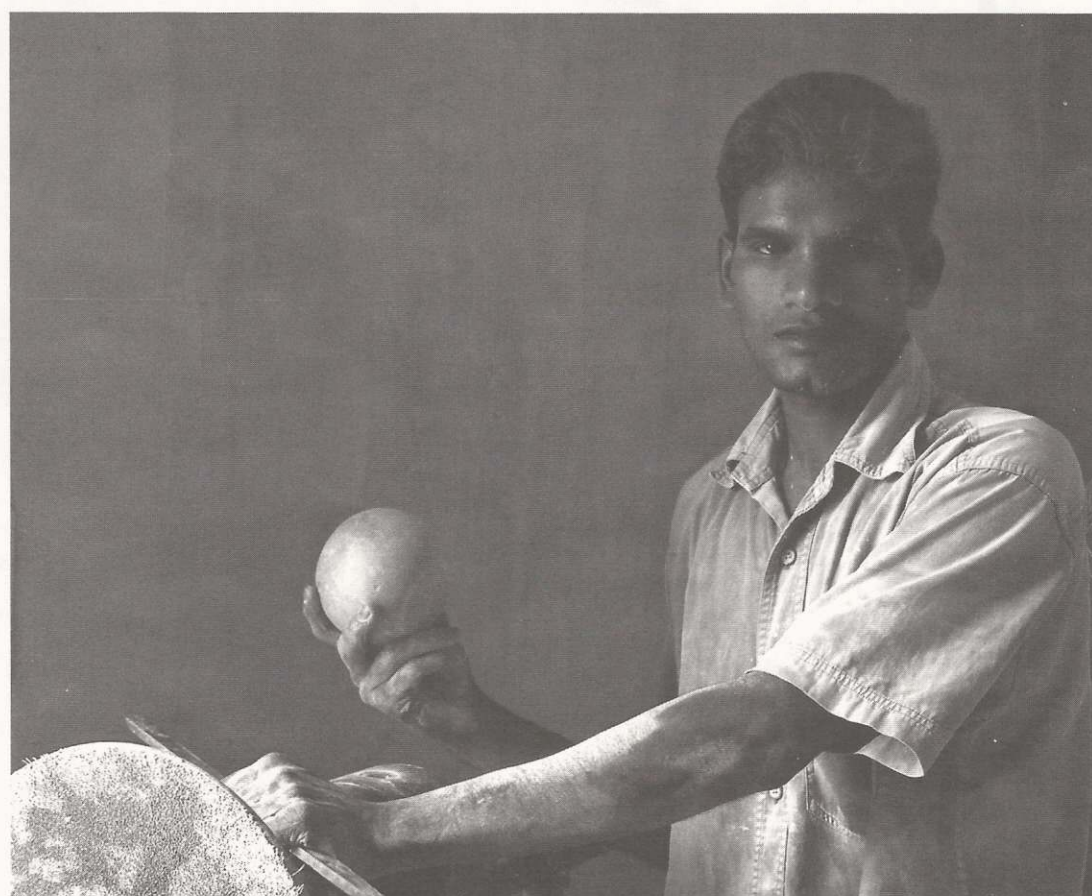
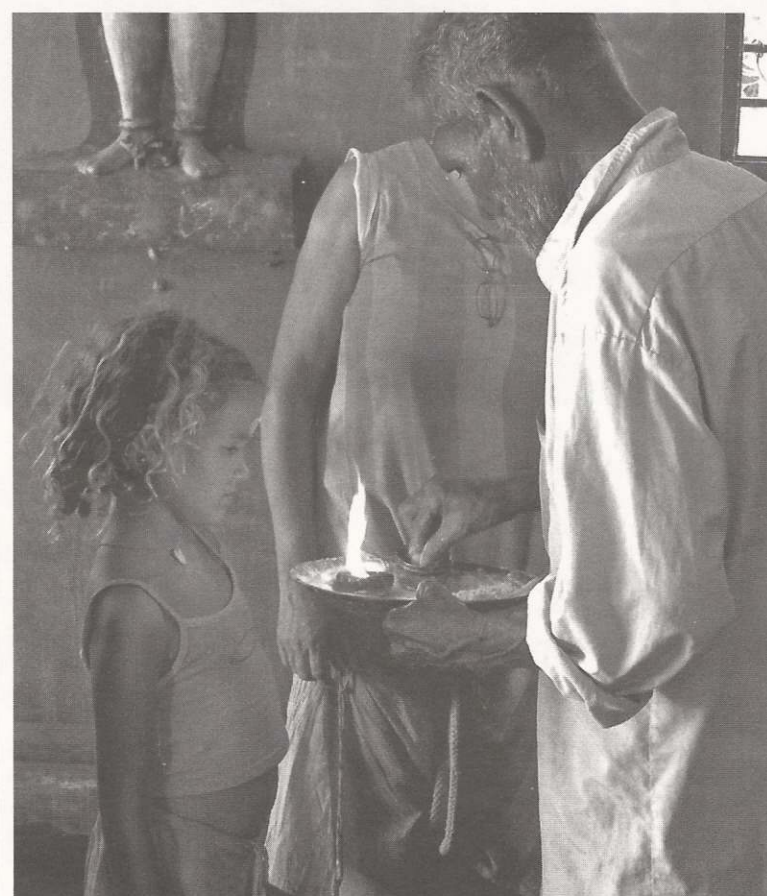
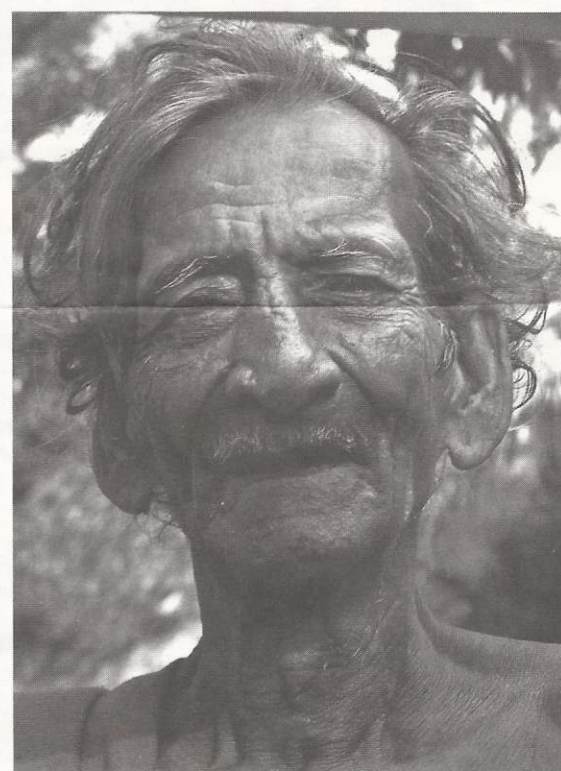
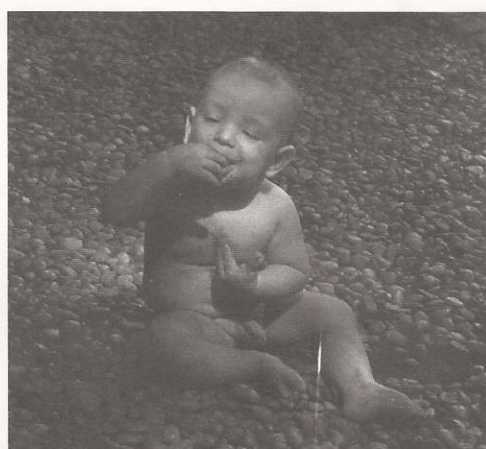
Shankar

Joanna's Auroville

Joanna, our guest editor for the past half year, is on a journey back to Poland where she hopes to get an Auroville Entry visa to return. Until then, she shares some of her impressions of life in Auroville and the bioregion, captured on a simple Nikon camera. Enjoy!



Clockwise from top left: Village youth picking lotuses from the Kuyilapalayam pond in June; Transfixed by a stray chameleon at Periyamudaliyarchavadi; Turiya's watchman; A worker in Auroganesh Stonecarving at Kuyilapalayam; A blessing by the priest at the Rayapettai temple; Indra and friend at the Youth Centre; Baby enjoying a morsel at the Sunday community lunch in Fertile East



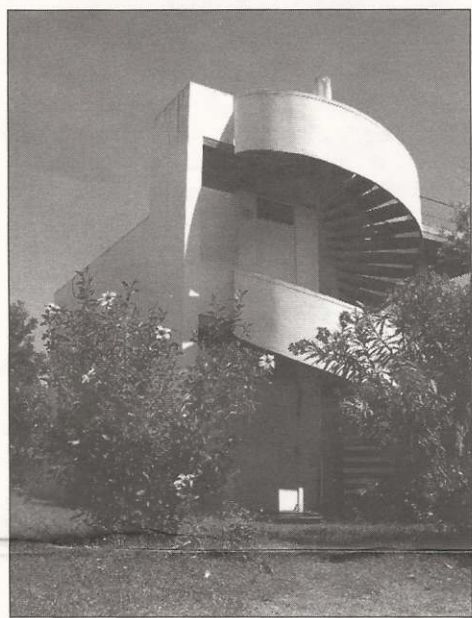
Building up Courage

Residents of Courage speaks about the experience of building community.

In 2000 Auroville was closed. The Entry Group had decided not to register any new Newcomers. Applicants just had to wait in line until Auroville opened its gates again. Why? The Entry Group termed it a housing crisis. There were not enough houses for Aurovilians, they said, so why take new people?

Working groups and architects tried to tackle the problem and came up with new housing projects. Rêve (French for 'dream') was one of them. Rêve was conceived as a low-cost housing project with subsidised living spaces. The project would provide 16 regular flats for families or singles, one Newcomer apartment and two youth apartments, to be funded by the Housing Service.

Aurovilians who had been living in inadequate accommodation eagerly signed up. Then the problems started. There were dissensions between the project holders and the architects and the residents began to lose faith. Swadha, a French national born in Auroville, wrote at the time, "We have awakened from our rêve. We have now agreed to call our community Courage, as this attribute of the Mother was the only one of her twelve attributes that hasn't yet been used to name a community in Auroville."



The characteristic spiral staircase of apartments in Courage.

Swadha has lived in many Auroville communities so she is able to compare them. "Aspiration, one of the first settlements in Auroville, was a great experience in the early days. No one really had their own house; we had shared accommodation in huts. And there was a community kitchen.

Courage is different. Here we have more privacy within our own four walls, but we don't have the promised common facilities yet. My mother Laurence and her partner Kamel were the first residents to move in. Shortly after, I followed and then my twin sister Swaha. Because of all the unkept promises nothing was really ready. The first years we spent all our free time fencing, planting and gardening.

"The apartments had been planned and built without walls around the kitchen and terrace space so the first monsoon took its toll. There were wet floors everywhere. After my son Kilan was born I decided to close the open space. Although I enjoyed being close to nature, too many animals were part of the household and the wind constantly blew the gas stove out."

Suresh, an Aurovillian from Puduchery, works at Nandanam School and the video library. He recalls, "My son Sauman was born the day after we moved into Courage. Slowly we converted the house to our liking and needs. Originally there was no bedroom door, no proper windows, poor ventilation, a leaking ceiling and sweating walls. I approached the Housing Service to rectify these mistakes. They promised to take care of it but to this day nothing has been done. So I had to take a loan, which I am still repaying, to do all the work myself."

What if?

The manifestation of Courage Phase II took two years. During the construction stage the architects resigned and the original design of the identical apartments changed. Residents constructed walls and windows appropriate to their means. Soon there was as much variety in the designs as in the residents.

David Nightingale, one of the original architects, is still emotional when he recalls what happened: "I had been involved at the design stage of Phase I and had also agreed to be the site architect as construction began. However, due to disagreements between our office and the Development Group regarding the delegation of responsibilities, I ultimately refused to continue in this role. I still stand by the basic concept of the project, but I had originally hoped that the apartments, whilst being adapted for individual tastes, would have had more of a unified language in the facades.

"In the end I feel it was a good attempt to create something new in Auroville. But I still feel that if our architects' office had been allowed to supervise the project some of the basic construction errors might have been avoided."

One continuing headache is the wastewater treatment plant. Courage is not the first and probably not the last community to struggle with a non-



Fostering community: a weekend painting project brings residents together.

functioning water-treatment plant. Anand, a former Ashramite, takes care of it. He explains: "The water still smells from bacteria. After many different tests I now concentrate on using various plants to clean the water. But this doesn't always work well as people still put too much detergent in their water and dump everything in their toilets, whether it is harmful or not. Each individual has to become more aware."

Integrating the subscribers of the 18 new apartments of Phase II into the existing development went smoothly. Basic guidelines were agreed upon concerning noise, parking, garbage separation and monthly contributions for water and the watchman. However, the proposal to share the costs of other common facilities like landscaping, community gates, improved fences and a covered parking space raised issues. Basically, there were two parties – those with more and those with less money. But when someone was not able to contribute their share, there was always someone else who stepped forward and donated more.

Shelter from the storm

Courage is a good example of a community which helps others in times of difficulty. So far, space for two families in need has been wholeheartedly provided. Paul Vincent has lived in Auroville for 34 years. Here is his story: "In the course of that unbelievable village gang war two years back I became a target as I was acting as the Police Liaison. At that time, my family and I lived in Acceptance and our house was isolated, so we were forced to relocate for security reasons. Within a month I was told that Courage was

ready to receive us. The community members had all been consulted and had agreed. After we moved in I received more threats. So we closed the balcony with a grill and the Security Board agreed that I would have a 24 hour guard for a few months." Even his close neighbours seemed to be fine with that solution.

The guard is gone now, and Paul, his wife Dhanalakshmi and her 2 children, are a valued part of the community. "Except for three or four residents the majority here are without financial means. But when we have problems, we all sit together and solve them. I thank this community for receiving us," concludes Paul gratefully.

A successful venture

Today, Courage is home to 42 adults, 15 children, 4 young people and 1 newcomer, all from 12 different nations. There are also some cats and Gotlib, the dog (who, once in a while eats a cat or two). The Courage community has the highest density housing in Auroville and it is working out well. The well-balanced mix of Indians and other nationals spices up the neighbourhood. Evidently, the new name provided a strong base for the Auroville *masala*.

Suresh concludes: "Despite all the setbacks, our community is the best! There is space for the children to play and sometimes we come together for pot-lucks and community work like cleaning up the place or repairing the fences. We respect each other's space and the overall atmosphere is good. This is a wonderful bunch of people."

Julietta (a resident of Courage)

CULTURE

Ophelia and O

A few weeks ago the Auroville Theatre Group presented 'Ophelia and O' at the New Creation Dance Studio

'Ophelia and O' is about two women who are victims, pawns in a larger game. In Shakespeare's play Ophelia loves Hamlet but, spurned by him, commits suicide. 'O' is the true story of a tribal girl from a West Bengal village who was made famous by a photograph in a best-selling calendar. However, one night she was gang-raped by men from her village and subsequently her life was one of ostracism and poverty.

This is potentially very powerful material. However, at least for me, much of the power was dissipated by the way in which the material was presented. Ophelia, for example, was played by three actresses who delivered the lines from Shakespeare's play while binding themselves with masking-tape, pouring red gel on their arms or playing with balls. Ophelia's lines were often difficult to hear, partly because only one of the three actresses could enunciate properly, but also because the words were accompanied, and sometimes drowned, by an insistent but irregular drum-beat which

bore no obvious relationship to Ophelia's predicament. Half-way through the evening the story of O was delivered, seemingly extempore, by the director as he toured the room.

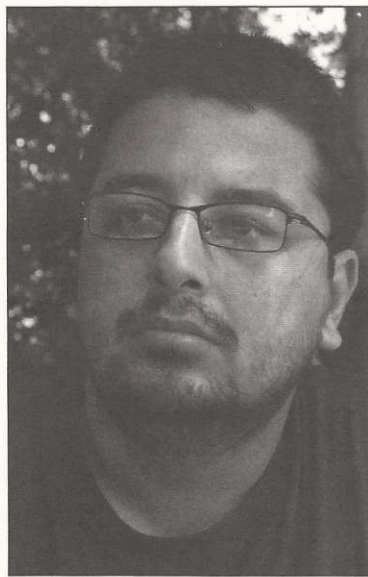
At the end there was no curtain call or obvious termination. The audience was simply invited to meet below for tea and discussion.

Clearly, this was alternative theatre and conventional expectations and responses do not necessarily apply. Aware that my confusion may have been due, at least partly, to my failure to understand the director's intentions, I talked to him the next morning.

Parnab Mukherjee has directed many alternative productions and events around India. Among other things, he is the artistic director of the Best of Kolkata Campus, a collective which does performances in non-proscenium (i.e. non-formal theatre) spaces.

So what kind of feedback had he received?

"Generally, people liked the play, although they are clearly not used to experiencing parallel soundscapes.



Director Parnab Mukherji

The nagging drumming cutting through the poetry of Shakespeare is extremely conscious. I was trying to create a sense of mental disquiet, crisis, in the audience, to make them choose what they wanted to listen to rather than merely being passive recipients. I want the poetry to be stripped from the familiar text, to smoulder anew, and this can happen when one's usual expectations are dislocated. There should be regular theatrical attempts to make great texts accessible in a new way."

But Parnab's interest lies in some-

thing beyond merely revivifying classic texts. His is a theatre of activism which aims at social change. "I want to give a voice to those who are voiceless, to put it on the public radar." Like O, for example. But doesn't the kind of experimental performance he directed in Auroville presuppose a very sophisticated audience? And doesn't this necessarily limit the number of people who will be exposed to the issues he feels should get wider coverage? Parnab acknowledges that he will always be tapping a semi-informed minority in this kind of performance. He points out, however, that he has put on performances in village squares that have successfully engaged a very different audience (presumably these performances were less experimental than the one we experienced).

Parnab is interested in process rather than simply the end-result. "For example, there is a tendency to view Sri Aurobindo simply through the published texts. But many of these texts evolved over a period of time because he himself evolved a million times: he's spiritually realized not because he was always like that but because he fought out everything. I'm bored by beautiful productions of Savitri. I am planning a performance which will incorporate not only changes he made in the text but also the violent disagreements generated

by the corrected text which was published by the Ashram Archives in 1993. Because if someone's work can generate such intensity – and, clearly, both sides in this argument are possessed by the text – it goes very deep."

Parnab is fascinated by Auroville. To discover more about its process he spent time reading back issues of Auroville Today and listening to the conversations of the Aurovilians who worked with him. "I sense there's a strong body of conflict here along with a strong will to elevate, to go beyond. Yours is an angst-ridden life because always, somewhere, there is the question, 'When, if ever, will I be transformed?'"

"I wanted to tap this tension in the performance. In fact, when the actresses spoke some of Ophelia's lines I sensed that the actresses were actually speaking about their own lives here: this was their play within a play."

Parnab acknowledges that, ultimately, he always feels 'unsafe' with his art. "I'll never know how many people are touched by it and what the long-term effect of it is. I also have this problem that as I get closer to what I want to achieve in terms of incorporating complexity, process and multi-dimensionality in my productions, I become obscurer."

It's a courageous, if hazardous, path to tread.

Alan

Thamarai, a new flowering of village relations?

On 12th November, in a beautiful old Tamil house in Edaiyanchavadi village, the Thamarai project was inaugurated. Auroville Today spoke to Kathy, one of the initiators of the project, about its origins and aims.

“In January this year we were having a lot of difficulties in Adventure. There were labour issues with one of our workers who comes from Edaiyanchavadi, the village right next to us, and we were regularly being confronted with mobs of angry men from the village. It got to the point where I was in utter despair – how, I wondered, could Auroville ever exist next to villages where there is such a consciousness divide? But then something came to me, like a message: ‘Work with the women, do something for the women.’”

Next morning Kathy talked to a few friends about the idea. They were enthusiastic. Kathy’s first idea was to put up a hut by the village sports ground and offer programmes for the villagers there. But someone suggested it would be better to use a house in the village itself, as the Mohanam Cultural Centre does in Kottakarai.

Chitra, who was staying in Adventure and who comes from Edaiyanchavadi, knew of an old house near the centre of the village. They contacted the owner in Puducherry and within a week they had been offered a five year lease on the building.

“It’s a beautiful old house with plenty of space,” says Kathy. “However, the speed at which everything was happening was a bit scary. But then we thought that as it would take time to raise money for renovations (US\$ 9,000 – 11,000 was the estimate), in the interim we would build connections with the village.”

A few weeks later, Helga Breuninger of the Breuninger Foundation visited Auroville. She heard about the idea and went to see the house for herself. Remembers Kathy, “I was in yet another crisis meeting concerning the village when suddenly I got this call from Helga saying she wanted to see me. When I met her she hugged me and said, ‘Kathy, I love your project. I’ll give you the money for the renovations and two years’ rent.’”

So it felt like a force for manifestation, something really wanted to happen, it was not we that were driving it.”

Meanwhile a team was forming. Chitra and Raji are from Edaiyanchavadi. Thulasi is from Sri Lanka and is fluent in Tamil, and Bridget is another member of Adventure community.

“For me the team is one of the most interesting and dynamic aspects of this project,” says Kathy. “I’ve never been part of a group which is so co-creative and harmonious.”

So what exactly is this project which Helga loved so much? Kathy laughs. “At that time, it wasn’t a project at all. We just had a few basic

ideas. We wanted to work with village women, to create a space for cooperation rather than rivalry (which we felt was one of the destructive dynamics of village life) and introduce them to joyful learning and sharing. And, of course, we want to empower them.”

The team recognised, however, that their first task was to build connections and trust and to find out what the villagers wanted. Learning that there were already 22 self-help savings groups in the village (*sangams*) involving about 400 women, the team began by contacting them. This

sense of identity seems to be related to the traditional roles they fulfil. And this is why Thamarai, which means ‘lotus’ in Tamil, became such an important symbol for the project. Because it brings in this belief there is an essential being in each of us which, given safe conditions and support, can become the acting centre of our lives. The lotus, which symbolises beauty emerging from inauspicious origins, was our way of expressing what we wanted to do – to allow the beauty, the essence, of each woman to flower into her daily life.”



Concentration exercise during one of the women’s workshops.

led to a number of exploratory workshops where, among other things, the women were invited to talk about their lives and their needs.

“Certainly income-generation is a big issue for them,” says Kathy, “and many of them are concerned about their children getting a good education.” But some of the findings were less predictable. For example, the women really appreciated the periods of silence which had been designed into the workshops. “They said that for those few minutes they could escape their worries,” says Kathy, “because it soon emerged that they are burdened by many family issues, like the threat of violence and husbands who drink a lot.”

“What was also very revealing is that the

Did the women understand this? “Yes, I think they really got it. In fact, some of them said how much they like the name.”

On the basis of the feedback, the Thamarai team have drawn up a list of programmes they would like to provide. It includes a daily play-group for pre-school children, a children’s activities day, and weekly health education and yoga programmes for the women. There will also be a library and a quiet room where the women can enjoy being in a peaceful space.

However, the Thamarai team soon realized that another group is clearly in need – the young village men. “A number of them approached us. They were hungry to learn, to develop skills in computing etc. But it was nice that some of them

also wanted to offer something – to teach, for example. So now we want to create spaces for youth activities. There will be a night school where children can come after school and be helped in their studies by some of the young men, as well as by international volunteers.

“Thamarai offers a great opportunity for volunteers from other nations to interact with the villagers and vice versa,” explains Kathy. “This is the local and the global aspect of the project.”

“The other thing I’d like to do is a village-mapping exercise, a way of helping the youth and women to understand how their village functions, how decisions are made etc. I don’t want to turn all the villagers into politicians, but what underlies this is the question of what ethical leadership in the villages would look like. Because I think that part of the present tension between Auroville and the villages is that the governance systems are so different.”

What do the male village leaders think of the Thamarai initiative? Raji says, “They are very happy that we are coming to the village. There are no obstacles on that side so far.”

Kathy cautions, however, that Edaiyanchavadi has a very particular history. Some years ago, the Ashram-run Auroshikha incense business, which was located in the village and employed many local people, closed down suddenly. It caused great hardship in many households and a lingering distrust of such initiatives. Some of the villagers also feel that Auroville has neglected their village in comparison with what it has done for villages like Kuyilapalayam. “We know about this underlying feeling,” says Kathy, “so the other basic idea of this project is to build a bridge between Edaiyanchavadi and Auroville. We see this as a long-term project for change. And I’m sure the women will be a key force in achieving this.”

And what about Kathy herself? Has the Thamarai project changed her attitude to Edaiyanchavadi? “Although none of our activities are running as yet, I already feel much more at peace with the situation. I’d reached a point where I thought that if I’m going to continue living in Adventure, this project has to work; I can’t live next to a village that I hate. That feeling has completely transformed. It’s a joy to go through the village now, to recognize some of ‘our’ women and children and be recognized by them. It feels like we are entering a deeper relationship.”

From an interview by Alan

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REFLECTION

Something escapes

January is the cruellest month, breeding Working Committee elections out of the dead land...

Well, not really, but I have to say I’m not looking forward to the blood-letting and brouhaha next month which generally accompanies our selection of a new Working Committee and Council.

Already the two armies are preparing for battle. On one side are the Democrats who flourish copies of the Auroville Foundation Act, asserting that the Residents Assembly is supreme. ‘Nothing must be done to countermand its will’, they cry. On the other side, the slightly more urbane Illuminati are convinced that only they or their friends have the consciousness to govern Auroville.

Meanwhile, good-hearted emissaries

scurry backwards and forwards between the two armies, desperately trying to find common ground before all hell lets loose.

Each camp is sure of one thing: that if they or their adherents are not elected, Auroville will go to rack and ruin. What neither camp appears to have considered is the possibility that Auroville has managed to survive in spite of, rather than because of, them. In other words, that there is a Force – call it Mother, the Divine, or what you will – which is holding this place together in spite of our very best efforts to the contrary. This Force has its own infinitely subtle way of working. It can’t be neatly parcelled-up, consequently it cannot be monopolised or claimed by either of the two opposing camps.

This leaves us with the distinct possibility that the two armies have been fighting a pointless battle, akin to the ‘big-enders’ and ‘little-enders’ in Gulliver’s Travels who went

to war because they differed over which end to break their eggs.

But now comes the hard part. Because it’s much, much easier to shout slogans or quote Mother than to access and work with something that doesn’t come wrapped in neat packages; something that, to our level of consciousness at least, may often seem unpredictable, even contradictory in its workings.

So how do we do it? I’ve no idea. I guess it begins, as so much else seems to do, with getting rid of old man ego, the one who’s so good at clogging up our receptors.

However we set about it, it’s worth remembering that every time we drop a template over Auroville and say ‘This is how it is’ or ‘This is how it should be’, It has already escaped and is dancing down the road.

Thank God.

Alan

AWARD

Talent honoured



On October 14th, 2006, Paul Vincent, a long time Aurovillian, was honoured by the Tamil Nadu Cinema association in the presence of co-stars and film directors for his participation in the box-office hit *Imsai Arasan 23am Pullikesi*. In the film Paul played the role of Nixon Dorai, a Tamil-speaking sub-collector. The historical comedy was popular with the public and ran for over 100 days in theatres across Tamil Nadu.

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