

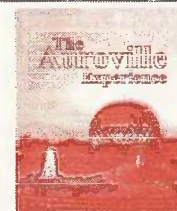
# Auroville Today

MARCH 2006, No.206

## MAIN THEME: Returning to Auroville

- An unfinished contract: Gérard and Fabienne
- 'I would privatize Auroville': Kumbha
- Into business: Satyen
- Just a matter of time: Sacha
- Discovering that 'something': Anandan

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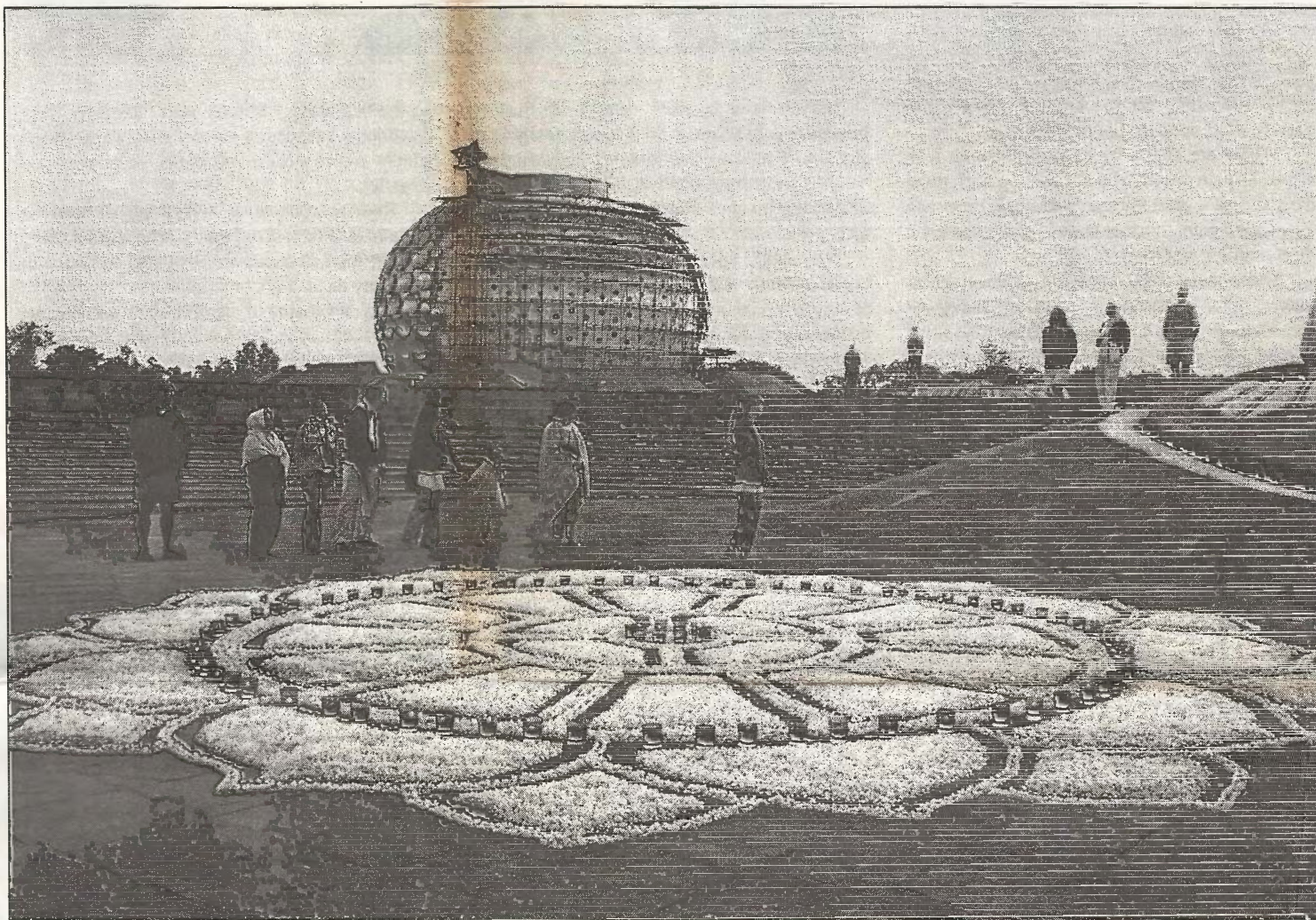
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## Returning to Auroville

Auroville has never been a static community: people have always flowed in and out.

In recent years, however, an increasing number of Aurovilians who left and worked for a considerable time outside the community have been returning to live here again.

Why did they leave? How was it to live and work outside? Why have they returned? Have they changed? Is the community they've returned to very different from the one they left? What would they like to change now, and how? These are a just a few of the questions we put to some returnees. The answers are fascinating. And challenging.



On February 21st, The Mother's birthday, a small crowd gathered before dawn in the amphitheatre to listen to the Auroville Charter read in four languages and to Mother's voice, reading the chapters Maheshwari and Mahakali from Sri Aurobindo's book 'The Mother'. Mother's symbol was laid out with flowers.

## "Our contract with Mother was not finished"

Gérard, Fabienne and their daughter recently returned to live in Auroville after leaving in 1989. Why did they leave? Why have they returned? What changes have taken place?

**G**érard travelled overland with the first caravan from France, arriving in Auroville in late 1969. He planned to stay for one year, "but then I met Mother". His first work was planting trees around Aspiration and helping construct the school. When the Matrimandir excavation began, he was one of a small group of Aurovilians who turned up every morning to crowbar the rock-hard laterite. He remained working at Matrimandir for the next 20 years.

Fabienne arrived in 1984 from a community in the Ardèche which already had strong links with Auroville. She worked in Pour Tous, on the Farm Group accounts, and finally with Prema in Auromode. After moving from community to community she settled with Gérard in Dana, where their daughter was born.

But then, in 1989, they left Auroville. Why? "I had already been working in the Sudan," explains Gérard, "on a short-term contract to earn money for the upkeep of Dana community. Then I heard that Satprem was dissatisfied with Auroville and that the Agenda team had moved out. It felt like something was going on that we could not be part of, so I thought, 'O.K., I'll just continue working outside'."

For the next 14 years the three of them lived in many differ-

ent parts of Africa and the Middle East. Gérard moved from contract to contract, working mainly for oil companies. Often he was working in countries where free speech was impossible and the political situation was very volatile. "But I learned in Auroville that when I have a problem I should give it to Her," says Gérard. "And always She gave me an answer. You learn that nothing is impossible when She's there."

In 2003 they decided to return to Auroville. Why?

"We never left!" says Gérard. "Although we had no outer contact with the community, almost every night I was in Auroville, often working on Matrimandir." "Yet, physically, Auroville seemed very far away," says Fabienne, "like something we couldn't reach any more. We felt we were in exile."

Partly, this was self-imposed. She explains that they deliberately avoided any contact with the community during those years so "we could evolve in our own way. We didn't want to be influenced by anything that was happening here. When we came back it was really our choice."

"Sometimes," explains Gérard, "I got this image of Matrimandir as a kind of light which gives direction to the soul when it leaves the body. It's like our souls were wandering and we had to come back here to make a new experience, a new life."

So returning was not a mental decision. I felt my contract with Mother was not finished, that we had to come back to finish the job."

But can't that work be done anywhere now? "Mother's Force is everywhere," agrees Gérard, "we felt it. But Auroville remains a special place. It's a laboratory where we can consciously accelerate the process. And this is the moment – there's a work to do. It's like something inside which you cannot escape."

"You need a place where you can work on yourself to find the new world. And it's difficult, very difficult, to work on yourself when you're living out there," says Fabienne. "There's never time, something is always catching at you. Here in Auroville you can adjust your rhythm of work according to your inner needs."

Today Fabienne works in Auroville Outreach, informing and receiving those who want to know more about the community. Gérard is back at Matrimandir. "Matrimandir and the gardens is the place where you can reconnect, go back into the mental silence. Then you can take it with you when you go into action again."

Action. In the 1970s and 80s Gérard had been very active in

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**“I** always knew I was going to come back to Auroville at some point,” says Satyen. “I just didn’t think it would be so soon.” ‘Soon’ is one way of putting it. Ten years ago, Satyen left Auroville to study at the Kodaikanal International Boarding School. Four years later, he moved to England to pursue his higher education. “Higher education was just one of the reasons I left,” he confesses. “It was all a bit too quiet for me here. I wanted to live in a big city, I wanted to go there, study, get a job and make it. I wanted a challenge. And then, being British, I also wanted to experience life in England for a few years.”

Having grown up in Auroville, Satyen had only gone to England for short visits until then. It was during his last year at university that he decided he would return to Auroville. “That’s when everybody’s focus is on their career. And I figured that, actually, I was planning on coming back to Auroville in a few years, so I asked myself what was the point in starting one over there myself.” That’s when Satyen realized “that my place was really in Auroville, in India, so I came back.”

The fact that Satyen’s family is in Auroville also played a role in bringing him back. “This is probably the longest time I’ve spent with my family, in Auroville, for the last ten years,” says Satyen, alluding to the past six months.

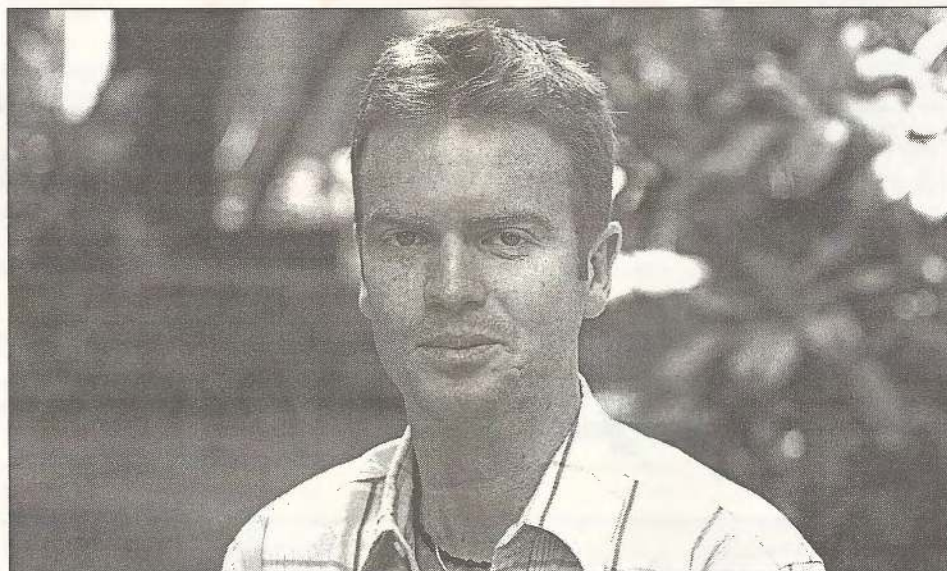
“There are also a lot of young people with whom I’ve grown up who are coming back these days. And it’s great to be able to spend time with everyone again. It also makes Auroville a bit more exciting and lively.”

There were also other little things which Satyen missed about Auroville, and India, the sunshine, (well, not surprising if you think of English weather), and masala dosas too.

“Auroville has definitely changed a lot over the years,” he observes, “but it still has that special feel of home.”

## “Together we are stronger”

Many commercial units have got into the comfort zone. But Auroville could become a focal point for new business, says Satyen.



Satyen

Satyen now holds a degree in Business Information Systems. And business really is his passion. “I’m interested in doing my own thing, building something, and watching it grow. Being a Scorpio, I’m quite competitive and I want to be successful.”

Six months ago, when Satyen came back, he began to work with Robert, who was starting a new commercial unit, G Fusion, which planned to market and sell coloured glass and gold tiles. In the beginning they focused on creating a brand name, and marketing their product. Satyen has also taken time to become more familiar with the product, “which I knew absolutely nothing about

in the beginning,” he confesses. Recently, they have started designing jewelry using the gold and glass tile concept: pendants, earrings and bracelets.

Right now, however, everything has been put on hold at G fusion, as Robert, who was planning to start his newcomer process, had to return to Germany on an urgent matter.

Satyen has lots of creative ideas and dreams for the future of businesses and commercial units in Auroville. “I think Auroville could become a centre, or focal point, for new business ideas and happenings,” he says. “There could be meetings and seminars. And people could come here for all

their needs: consulting, designing, producing, whatever. It would also attract people who are good in their field, as they would recognize there is something for them here.”

He also has strong views about the present situation. “In the past,” Satyen remembers, “business was a little frowned upon in Auroville. Running a commercial unit was considered ‘wrong’ by many. Now that is starting to change, as people realize that in order to run a city, you need adequate funds.”

“Right now, there isn’t much forward planning in Auroville, in terms of business,” he observes. “There’s a comfort zone that many of the commercial units here get into. They have a couple of regular clients, and they’re happy this way, they don’t want to expand and grow. But there’s a risk. The clients they depend on might one day get a better deal elsewhere. And what will the units do then? It’s easier, with a bit of marketing to have to turn down orders than it is to all of a sudden try to find clients and beg for orders, because you’ve got some fifty employees and no work.”

He also feels people doing business should collaborate more. “When a business unit in Auroville deals with their clients, it could direct them to other businesses in Auroville which offer other services or products they may need. There is so much going on here, there are so many people with different backgrounds and skills,” he continues, “but everyone is too focused on their own activity.”

Together with others, Satyen would love to one day open a ‘business centre’ in Auroville. “You’d have everything: graphic designing, accounting, consultancy etc. Everyone would be independent, but working under one company. That way, individuals or companies coming here would be able to get all their needs taken care of,” he explains. “People can do their own thing but together they are stronger.”

Emmanuelle

## Discovering that ‘something’ in Auroville

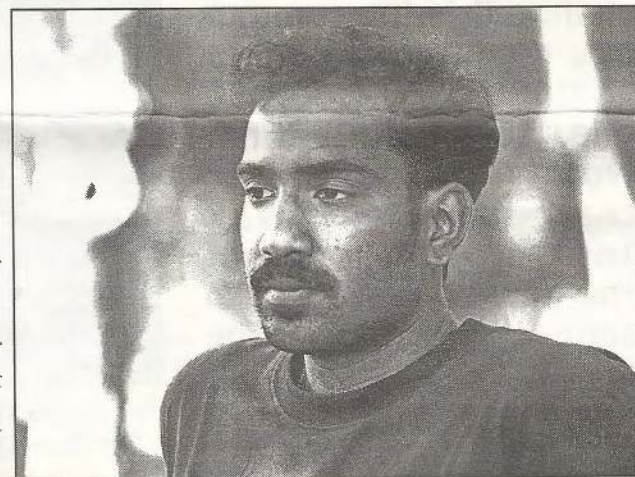
**“I**t’s time to reconnect and I am happy to be back,” says 23 year-old Anandhan. From the age of 10, Anandhan has been studying outside Auroville. “My parents felt it would be good for me to get a good education.” Armed with a bachelor’s degree in computer applications, Anandhan now is fully plugged into Auroville – he is part of the Cynergy ‘dream-team’ by day and works the sound and lights at Cinema Paradiso by night. “I am a workaholic,” he confesses. He lives by himself in Abri, but visits his parents for dinner every evening. “Though they are happy I’m back, they are also very concerned what I’m going to do further. For I’m not really interested in making money, contrary to many of my friends who studied to get well-paying jobs.”

Living outside Auroville had its disadvantages. “Most of all,” he says, “it’s missing out on all that happens in Auroville; on growing up with your friends, on the multi-cultural aspects... perhaps even on picking up a language besides

English and Tamil. And now I have a lot of catching up to do.” The work at Cynergy helps him tackle this to some extent. “What I like most about my day job is that I get to interact with individual Aurovillians – we go to their homes, install equipment and solve their software problems, and it’s at these times I feel most connected to the people.” But he has noticed that life in Auroville is not simple – even if all he wants is to live a simple life. “There is a lot of struggle in Auroville. It’s probably part of our growing up process,” he says. “Those who are really connected to Auroville must feel this – they go through the struggle and the pain.”

He is still trying to find himself and says that one of the best moments of the day is when he is all alone at the auditorium testing the equipment for the evening’s movie. “That’s when I have quiet time to myself – and I cherish that time very much. I am trying to discover something, something different; what it is I don’t know... I am still searching.”

Priya Sundaravalli



Anandhan

## “Our contract with Mother was not finished”



Gérard and Fabienne

what happened, not for one minute, because I think at that time it was the way to be and we could not let Auroville be in the hands of the Sri Aurobindo Society. Now things have changed. What is possible now may not have been possible then.”

“We’ve changed too, we’ve definitely changed,” says Fabienne. “Perhaps we’re more comprehensive now, more able to appreciate ...I remember when we first revisited Auroville in 2000 our first reaction was incredible gratitude for those who had stayed on, who had kept this place going.”

“There’s a sentence in the Agenda,” says Gérard, “where Mother says, in reference to Auroville, that she doesn’t want this or that, but this and this and this: no exclusivity. It’s only a small sentence, but I’ve learned...Now if I have a strong opinion and try to insist on it against others, I feel uncomfortable. But if I can accept it has to include both this and that – even if the ‘that’ is something I completely disagree with – often there comes out of it a true answer which is much more than my or your opinion. It’s a kind of alchemy.”

“Ultimately, it’s nothing to do with morality, with ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – I don’t know anymore what ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ is. I just know when I am with Her and when I am not with Her. And when I am not with Her I feel very

bad. So it’s a matter of calling Her, more and more.”

While Fabienne and Gérard are very happy to be back, they have no illusions about the present challenges facing Auroville. To Fabienne, the Auroville of today seems “very mentalised. We have to be careful not to fall back into the ways of the old world.” They point to the “New Age spirituality”, the bureaucracy and the politics, and the danger that Aurovillians will become, in Satprem’s phrase, functionnaires of the adventure – creating a safe space for themselves rather than pushing hard for something new.

“When you’re confronted with these problems,” says Gérard, “you can get depressed and leave, or you can make an inner movement and offer it to Her. Then, if you are sincere, you know the change will come. When the difficulties are at their maximum, there’s a strong possibility of something new emerging. But this will happen quicker if the Aurovillians really concentrate upon this, if we choose for this every minute of the day. Mother has given us a work in Auroville, to discover the new world, to make the transformation. Now the pressure is very great, now is the time to do this. We both feel this very strongly.”

From an interview by Alan

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opposing the Sri Aurobindo Society’s attempt to claim proprietorship of Auroville. He had also been critical of those Aurovillians whom he described as being ‘less engaged’.

How does he look back on that period now?

“I was part of the so-called ‘French group’. Many of the things we did then were maybe not the truth, but sometimes the Divine uses the unconscious to get things done. I don’t regret



# "I'd privatize Auroville"

A young Aurovilian who studied business in Holland comes back with some challenging ideas

"I'm good at marketing, presenting, anything where I can talk!" I've hardly got my first question out and Kumbha is already in charming full flow. No wonder he's so successful at Sound Wizard. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Kumbha was born in Auroville in 1979. He went through the Auroville school system but didn't study for exams. "I was more into mechanics then. Sukrit and I taught ourselves about cars and we put together a Citroen in our spare time. It was fun."

But he wasn't sure he wanted to stay in Auroville: he wanted to see more of the world first. He bought himself a ticket to Europe but then had a bad motorcycle accident which put him in bed for six months, followed by six months rehabilitation. As soon as he was fit again he bought himself another ticket. "I thought I'd be back in half a year."

He travelled to Holland, Canada, the US, London, enjoying new places, new people, but also looking for a job. That wasn't easy: "It didn't occur to me that I was only 18 and a bit young to be doing this." Finally he lodged up in Zutphen, Holland, where he stayed with the family of an Aurovilian.

That summer there was an international meeting of Citroen fanatics in Holland. He decided to go along and make a bit of money in the process. He asked his mother, Li Mei, to print out some Citroen t-shirts she'd designed and send them over. "I hitch-hiked to the meeting, slept under cars, and sold all the t-shirts straight out of my duffle bag. Great."

While there, he noticed that a company which made kit cars and modified Citroens had a Zutphen address. He met the owner and got a job. "But he always told me I could do better than this, that I should be trying for something more." He suggested Kumbha go to college.

Kumbha first thought of studying jet engine mechanics. "But then I realized what I really wanted to study was business: I've always liked buying and selling stuff." In fact, his business career began at Certitude Sports ground where, at the age of 14, he was already selling things

off the back of his bike to young Aurovilian innocents. "Muni challenged me to make money and gave me one rupee as start-up. I bought chutney, sold it, bought more, sold it, bought a Pepsi...and so it went on. By the time I stopped, I had several thousand rupees."

Kumbha signed up for a four year course in business and management studies at a college in Arnhem. "I had no clue about studying - I'd quit school at 16. The first assignment was to write a one page account of myself on the computer. I didn't know anything about computers, formatting etc., so that one page took me six hours! I thought, I'm never going to survive this course."

He struggled through the first year, but then he really began to enjoy it. His graduation assignment was to draw up a strategic marketing plan for a Dutch corporate. They were so impressed they employed him for a further year to implement it.

His contract finished, he fulfilled a long-term dream and bought a round-the-world ticket. He travelled to North America, New Zealand, Australia, south east Asia... "I was still looking for potential places to live because by then I'd discovered I didn't want to stay in Holland." At the same time his personal business plan was to do a management traineeship with a multinational company in the West, with the idea of eventually starting up his own business in India or south-east Asia.

"But then I came to Auroville and I suddenly thought, 'Hey, why do I have to do that management traineeship? Why all the stress, and hard work?'" He stayed.

Had Auroville changed? "I couldn't get over how many work groups had sprung up - there's a group for everything here. And the bureaucracy! At the same time there was still the simplicity of it all, the friendly, small-town feeling. The big change, however, was India. Suddenly, everything here seemed to be moving fast forward."

Kumbha sees the opportunities for Auroville in a new, dynamic India. "We definitely have the talent, the know-how. I had ideas about starting up new companies here, even

dreaming of setting up joint-ventures with people like Tata to build solar cars. Now, a year on, it doesn't look so easy." He mentions the "extreme restrictions" placed upon business in Auroville which make it unattractive to outside companies, the fact that competition is frowned upon, and the 'mom and pop store' units which generate little energy and money for the community as a whole.

"And then there's this religious thing, 'He said', 'She said'. That really grinds me down. We've got this beautiful Charter which puts down enough broad guidelines. So why do we keep pulling things out of books which don't necessarily apply any longer?"

So what's his answer? "I'd privatize everything. Let there be competition between Auroville units, let Aurovilians earn a decent wage so they can build things and take a holiday. If somebody wants a Ferrari, fine: I want people to enjoy life to the maximum. At the same time people shouldn't take advantage, we're here to build a town. But it has to be voluntary; you can't force people to contribute to Auroville."

"I see no contradiction between privatization and the Charter. The Charter gives us a direction towards unity, it doesn't specify that we can't have private enterprise here or that we can't collaborate with companies outside. Privatization gives organizations the liberty to act in a way which is the most beneficial to the customer and the organization. The market economy is also a great tool to generate the drive which we've been missing here. Anyway, most of us still need a goal that is tangible. I sometimes joke about it - first we need to make enough money to get out of survival mode, then we can start doing the yoga!"

Kumbha wants much more interchange



Kumbha

between Auroville and India. "Take the idea for a new Pour Tous distribution centre. Personally, I'd bring in the Nilgiris (a south Indian supermarket chain) people. We could set up the space, write a contract which obliges them to purchase Auroville products etc. then let them run the show. After all, that's what they're good at. We shouldn't feel threatened by the world out there."

And his personal ambitions? "For me the future, for now, is here. I'd like to make Sound Wizard, (the acoustic design consultancy where he works) the biggest thing of its kind in India: as far as I'm concerned, the sky's the limit. I like working hard, it gives me a buzz, and I enjoy the regular travelling which keeps me in touch with developments. It's amazing how fast things are moving in India. When I come back, Auroville looks a bit slow..."

From an interview by Alan

## Just a matter of time

Sacha returns after ten years abroad.

"One of the main reasons I've come back," says Sacha, who grew up in Auroville and has returned after a period of ten years abroad, "is that I actually never really found myself over there. Even when I was doing a job that felt sensible, I could never use my energy like I can use my energy in Auroville. So in that

one of Auroville's local rock bands of the time: "The Atomic Bullock Hearts", later renamed "Nevermind".

So when he arrived in Sweden, he applied to a local school and was accepted. "That was a fantastic experience, we all played lots of music of course, and had lots of fun as well," he says. After music school, he studied sound technology.

Then, one summer, he got the

ational teacher in sports and health, with the option of working with either adults or children. During his first practical training period, Sacha got a chance to go to Tanzania, in Africa and work in a refugee camp. His second training period was spent at Transition School, in Auroville, working with Juan and Aloka.

After his studies were over, the organization which had sent him to Tanzania offered him a job: to return and open a centre for children there, and bring in volunteers to help in the refugee camps. He accepted immediately. Six months later, however, the centre had to be closed down. "The refugees were being repatriated back to Burundi and there were bombs going off. The whole situation was not that secure anymore, so unfortunately we had to leave."

Sacha returned to Sweden, where he continued his work with the children. During those years, Sacha regularly returned to Auroville for short visits. Until last November, that is, when he actually returned to settle. "I always knew I would come back. It was just a matter of time," he says with a smile.

Sacha feels that Auroville has changed in many ways since the time he left. "I feel the society has become much more individualistic. People just don't come together anymore like they did in the past," he observes. Sacha remembers how Ami, the youth community where he lived for many years, and which he has now come back to, was the

'hangout', "where people just dropped in any time for a cup of tea." There was a lot of life, energy and constant interaction between people then. Sacha misses those times. He also remembers the Saturday evening parties there: "When some people think of parties, they immediately think of alcohol and vital energy and all that. But I tell you, it was a way for people to get together. There were people of all generations and walks of life coming together. We have to find new ways of finding this sense of community again."

Now that Sacha is back in Auroville, he does not want to start working with children right away, though he may eventually. Very soon after he arrived, he heard the Quiet Healing Centre needed somebody at the reception in the afternoons. So he took it up. "What I enjoy about my work at Quiet is its social aspect," he says. "Since I've just come back, it's a nice way for me to reconnect with people and meet all those Aurovilians who come down for massages, or other therapies. I'm also interacting with all the therapists working there, who make such a great team."

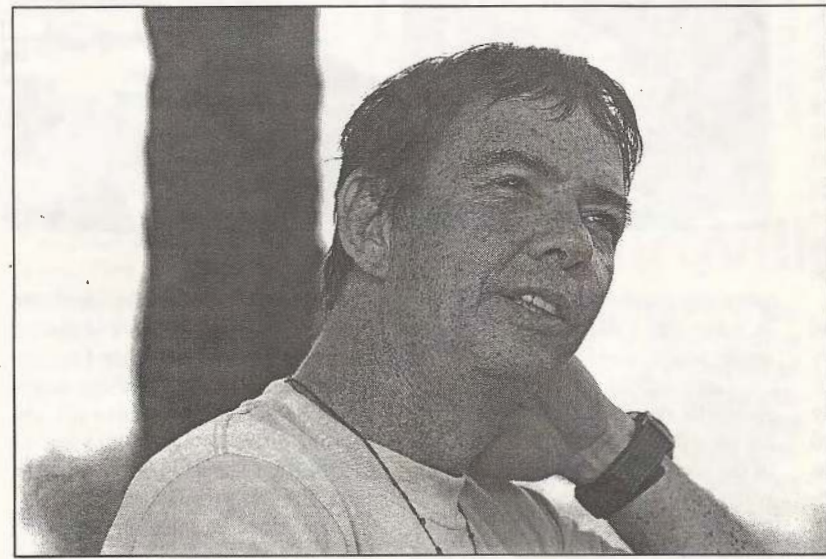
What Sacha really wants to get involved in, however, is the Auroville Archives. "I find it so important!" he exclaims. "Auroville is such an interesting project, and its history is so special. I think it's very important to document all that. General Tiwari has done a fantastic job for all these years, putting all this information together! What I would like to get involved in is bringing all

this information online, so people can access it. I would also like to interview different people who have been here since the early days. We have to try and catch up on the history. There are some people who have left us, and their stories are gone. We have to try and save these life stories." He would also like to involve the schools and artists in projects on Auroville's history.

Sacha feels it is important for people who have grown up in Auroville to leave for some time, and see the world, and that although Auroville is special, they should realize that there are great people and great things happening out there as well. "I also think that it is important for those who have grown up here to share Auroville with the rest of the world. I don't mean just with words, but with the energy that they carry, with their way of being, and doing things," he says. And when these young people come back to Auroville, he continues, they bring back something with them as well: they come back with new experiences and new ways of seeing things.

"Although I am extremely happy to be back in Auroville, I also know that it's not going to be easy," he concludes. "It's not an easy place because you really come face to face with yourself here. You have to deal with all those fears and contradictions you have inside yourself. So it's a challenge, but it's also a constant learning and growing experience and that's what makes it so interesting."

Emmanuelle



Sacha

sense, I never felt that I was really there, as a whole person, like I do when I am here."

Before he left in the mid nineties, apart from having opened one of the only 'real' restaurants in Auroville then, L'Aventura, where he worked as a chef, Sacha was really into music. He was part of

chance to work at a camp with children who have ADHD and Asperger Syndrome and that was it! "I found the work I did with these children incredibly intense and rewarding, and I definitely wanted to continue," he says.

So he went back to his studies, training this time to become a recre-



# Auroville is the sum of all its components

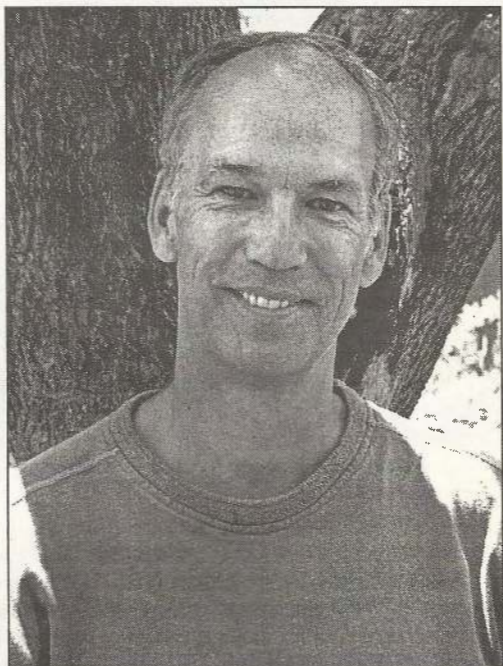
Roger Toll left Auroville in 1979 after eight years of living both at the Matrimandir Workers Camp and at Certitude. Today he is a journalist and writer living in the United States. He visited Auroville in late December-early January. Auroville Today asked him for his impressions.

**Y**ou may physically leave Auroville, but it stays in your soul as indelibly as the red earth that colors the feet of Aurovilians. I return from time to time, every five years or so, and take mental snapshots of the town, like time-lapse photographs. While Auroville seems the same at a soul level, in terms of its development it seems very different each time I visit, like seeing a person only periodically through his life. Perhaps it's easier to notice Auroville's changes and growth when you only visit occasionally and distance offers a different perspective.

For example, I find Auroville remarkably changed from five years ago, as though something has opened up to allow energy to flow into previously closed corners of its body. I have the impression, perhaps for the first time, that love is now an active, rather than sub-surface, force. I'm not talking about that divine love at the heart of Auroville, put there by the Mother herself. That was always there. No, this feels new, as if Aurovilians have finally left their contentious past behind and accepted to love, really love, their brothers and sisters. People no longer seem enclosed in their own little boxes, with their high walls and a label pasted on the side.

Five years ago, Auroville was burdened by serious challenges, angry tensions and bottled-up energies. There was encroachment on Auroville lands by outside interests, criminal activity imported from the outside etc. Internally, the community was being ripped apart by tensions in and around the Matrimandir and elsewhere. Five years later, it is hard to find any deep,

serious tension. There is more humour, more smiling, a tolerant awareness that the daily resolution of issues is merely part of the process of growing. It all feels more mature,



Roger Toll

more realizable.

Perhaps it was the change of administration at the Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, that freed the energies of Auroville and made room for more joy, openness and tolerance. Maybe, too, it is the mellowing of Auroville's pioneering 60s-generation that, disgusted with a world gone very wrong in that tumultuous decade, brought its grievances, radicalism and passions and planted them, along with the trees, in Auroville's soil. It is a generation that struggled to dismantle the ideological walls that suffocated it,

but in the process brought in a certain closed-mindedness that may have been, in retrospect, equally confining. I sense this time that these ideologies, this fervid clinging to positions, may be drifting away, like detritus after a storm.

I had a powerful revelation this visit. Auroville is the sum total of ALL of its components, they are ALL necessary, and they are all part of that difficult grinding, grating and wearing down that is the necessary process for Auroville to become the site of a real human unity, the town's most immediate goal. So it's not a matter of good or bad Aurovilians. Auroville is not an ashram of would-be saints, but a laboratory full of specimens of the whole world. Recent arrivals are as important as the old-timers, complainers as much as those

who quietly get on with their work, architects of the baroque as much as architects of zen-like simplicity, highly educated Indians steeped in millennia-old teachings as much as raw, rugged Westerners. As Auroville grows, it becomes more complex, but there is a growing tolerance that allows for this complexity and diversity to be integrated.

In the end, Auroville's success will not be measured by how many "pukka" buildings are erected or how many residents there are. The more urgent measure of success is the accu-

mulation of the slow, certain changes that happen in each individual, and thereby in the collective. What a long process it is! Never before has a large, rag-tag assortment of beings, a sampling from the world's nations and cultures, been thrown together and offered a mission of such vast, transformational proportions. What delighted me during this visit is that Auroville seems to have a new thrust of growth and a hope of prosperity precisely because its people are growing.

I know that some old Aurovilians say how much better it was when Mother was alive, how ordinary it seems today, more like the ordinary outside. When Mother was alive, I awoke daily asking whether her body had been transformed during the night. It was that close, that possible. When it didn't happen, I fell back on Sri Aurobindo's comment that the transformation might well take a thousand years, but it WOULD happen. It changed my perspective from the moment to the millennial, from this life to the cycle of lives. That's how I feel about Auroville. It's a laboratory of evolution, but evolution is slow, even with the Supramental manifested. People change slowly, even when sincerely doing the yoga. Auroville is changing about as fast as its constituent parts – the Aurovilians themselves – are changing. At the same time, Aurovilians have changed and grown enormously in 30 years, far faster I suspect than would have been possible outside Auroville. And these changes seem to be deep and permanent. That sounds like real evolution.

The world has changed from what it was 30 years ago. It is very small now, so it is hard to be an island, and

there are interesting developments that Auroville needs to be a part of. I think Auroville can benefit from breathing in and breathing out. It can learn from new people who come, who have experience as practitioners or builders or thinkers, unlike we early arrivals who were young, starry-eyed amateurs. While Auroville learns from the world, it can also teach the world and serve as an example of how to live better, more consciously, more communally, more self-sustainably.

Still, there are plenty of challenges, which is natural in such an ambitious undertaking. The difficulties are what force us to go beyond ourselves; they are the engine of our change. Among the more serious problems, it seems to me, are issues of internal governance, which today is too weak and unstructured; inequality of financial resources among Aurovilians; cultural tensions between South Indian, North Indian and Westerners; the integration of Tamil villagers as Aurovilians; and the precarious position of foreigners in the face of visa renewals. Obviously, the economy is not in line with Auroville's ideals. Are people sufficiently aware of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's teachings? And the restrictions on freedom of expression and a tendency to self-censorship are a serious, seditious threat to the health of the community.

But these can be worked out over time, through maturity, goodwill and tolerance. The important change that I have seen this time is that Auroville now is able to move forward dynamically since there seems to be a richer unity than ever, a unity based on love and common purpose, beyond labels, divisions and walls.

## "Auroville has widened and moved on"

Old-timer Larry speaks about his early life in Auroville and when he'll be back.

**L**ike many free-thinking young Westerners in the 1970s with a thirst to break out of the mould, Larry headed to the sub-continent the long way. Having just finished a psychology and philosophy degree, he traveled overland by van from London with friends.

He passed through many Muslim countries, including Afghanistan and Iran. "The world was very different and it was a real eye opener for me," he says. "It profoundly changed the way I saw everything."

When Larry arrived in India he had a strong sense he would stay 'for a while'. Travelling to see the famous Meenakshi temple in Madurai, he stopped over briefly in Pondicherry and took the opportunity to visit the Ashram.

But the forces of destiny intervened when he was at the Samadhi, and saw an Indian devotee that he'd met years before in America. "We just looked at each other in amazement," he says. "At that time he was joining Auroville and he insisted that I cycle with him to see it that day."

Larry was intrigued by the embryonic community. Sitting under the banyan tree, he asked someone nearby if help was needed. "It was the evening before the excavation of the Matrimandir," he says, "so yes – they needed help! The next day I showed up and began work."

Larry quickly became involved in the potent early vision of Auroville, dividing his working hours between the nursery and the Matrimandir. With

some other early pioneers, he built an early community near Kottakarai, trying to be more intimately connected with the village. He planted trees and started a clinic.

While he had read a lot about the dream of Auroville, "my commitment wasn't so much a mental one – it just felt like the right thing to do," he says. "I had the opportunity to meet with Mother a few times, which was very, very powerful and very confirming of my experiences. I became totally devoted to Auroville and didn't leave for 12 years."

Despite the fact he had no baking experience, Larry began making bread for friends with Sundaram, a youth from the local village. The bakery grew to supply most of Auroville, and then a tofu unit was started after a visitor from China taught Larry the method. "In the beginning, it was beautiful in a way," he says. "You'd build your house or bakery on faith, and it would work out! People would bring things or help as it was needed."

Around 1980, Larry became involved in establishing the community of Aurodam, helping plant trees. He constructed a house, and his family grew to include a daughter, and two sons – one of them an Indian boy he took in and raised.

In 1991, Larry began regularly visiting his aging parents in America, working there for two or three months each time. He noticed that his approach to work had changed while he'd been away. "When I went back to America I could pick up jobs quite easily," he says, "and I attributed that to the spirit

of Auroville, because everyone was doing things they'd never done before. So that ethic served me very well."

Later on, Larry brought his daughter to America to settle her into university. He was urged by friends to take up further studies as well. "Here I was getting older and doing construction work and waiting, and they said: 'You're intelligent, you can learn things. Why don't you go back to school?'"

Larry took courses through California's community college system, qualified as a registered nurse in two years, and quickly gained expertise in the psychiatric field. "I was fortunate that I got a job in a hospital that understood my involvement with India," he says. "They would let me off for two or three months a year, which in America is very difficult. So I've been working in this hospital and coming back to Auroville every year for the last 11 years."

He now supervises the weekend hospital shift, but each time Larry returns to Auroville he carries out different kinds of work – most recently tsunami relief. "I've always loved Auroville grunt work! It was a great experience to go with a bunch of people into a devastated village and help clean up. Every time I come to Auroville, it is usually shown to me how to participate."

Larry says he will 'absolutely' return to Auroville permanently, sometime in the not-too-distant future. "I still feel the work I'm doing [in the USA] is developing my self-capacities, and allowing me to take care of my responsibilities. It might all change



Larry

when my daughter has her baby soon in Auroville! I might be back permanently sooner than I think."

Larry agrees the atmosphere in Auroville is very different now from the early days, but likes the current feel of the place. "I feel Auroville is much wider now, more accessible and transparent. Although it's lost a lot of its kibbutz-style involvement, I'm glad that Auroville is a place where people can learn things, dance, play music. Although the initial stage was a very profound experience for me, I'm glad it has widened and moved on."

As for making the transition between two cultures, Larry believes he's developed a 'certain dexterity'. "The work I do in the States is very

intense, working with very psychotic people," he says. "When I'm there I plug into that work, and then I just get on a plane and switch. Whether supervising a psychiatric hospital or whether planting a tree in Auroville, I find in both settings I'm able to do my karma yoga, and that's very important to me."

And does he long for Auroville when he's not here?

"Very, very much so. And when I'm here, I never long for America! Auroville is definitely my home and is the reality for me. The things in Auroville that have changed me and had such a profound effect on me, always stay with me. That's why they're so valuable."

Lesley



# "The missing piece is the Whole"

Savitra lived in Auroville from 1969-1990 before returning to the U.S. where he has authored several books. On a recent visit, he celebrated the release of the Indian edition of his book *An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millennium*. He also spent a lot of time attending meetings and talking with Aurovilians. Here he shares his perceptions.

There is a need for deep healing in this community. Over the past weeks, I've seen much time taken up in General Meetings by individuals simply letting out unhealed frustrations. There needs to be a place or way in which Aurovilians who feel disempowered and marginalised can be heard and acknowledged. If this is not done, the effectiveness of any new proposals for economy, governance, development etc. will continue to be undermined by those who don't feel included; who feel, in other words, that the proposals are coming from 'them', not 'us'.

When Mother left in 1973, we Aurovilians were effectively orphaned. Unfortunately, the authority figures who tried to fill the vacuum kept telling us we didn't know what we were doing, that "You'd better listen to us, otherwise you'll make a mess". This is a soul-killing message, but at a certain point, people begin to believe it. Then they withdraw, just working on their own projects, feeling disconnected, disrespected, discouraged from contributing to a whole from which they felt cut off.

It's like putting a cork in a collective bottle. I see a lot of dedicated people and wonderful projects, but also this bottled-up creativity – this suppressed potential that has kept people and projects from blossoming together. In fact, what has been achieved has been done largely despite the dominant leadership rather than because of it.

In this sense, I believe the fixed-vision ideological approach to building the City has suppressed the spirit of community. When people say, "I know what Mother wanted, follow me," it disempowers everyone else. It means that what Mother said at a certain time to a certain person is the only way we can trust ourselves to get the answer. It implies absolute obedience to what has already been written or said. If this was a traditional guru-disciple yoga, this would be perfectly valid. But this is an evolutionary yoga and Auroville is intended to be a collective experiment to explore and embody this yoga.

Evolutionary leaders know how to 'midwife' change by drawing out the potentials of individuals and community. They are integrators and team-builders, facilitating collaboration as the foundation for all other building. They also have the wisdom to draw in outside consultants if specific pieces are missing.

They know that when trust is nurtured, a certain collective 'resonance' builds up as people feel they are lending their energies to a common receptive field. Ultimately a synergistic shift occurs which one simply can't achieve through narrow top-down leadership; for this resonating 'group field' itself takes on a progressive self-organizing capacity as the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts, expanding Resident's Assembly into a new form of 'Resonance' Assembly.

This coherence starts at small group levels. It doesn't happen by try-

ing to change 1800 people at once. It happens as a result of many one-to-one encounters and small group meetings where intimacy, trust and compassion are built between individuals.

How to put trust and compassion at the basis of our relationships in this community? How to rebuild our collective being from inside out? I don't know, but we can always begin by praying for it, invoking the Divine. That's the only process in which I can place all my trust; because it puts the problem in the hands of an all-healing, all-loving Wisdom and Power.

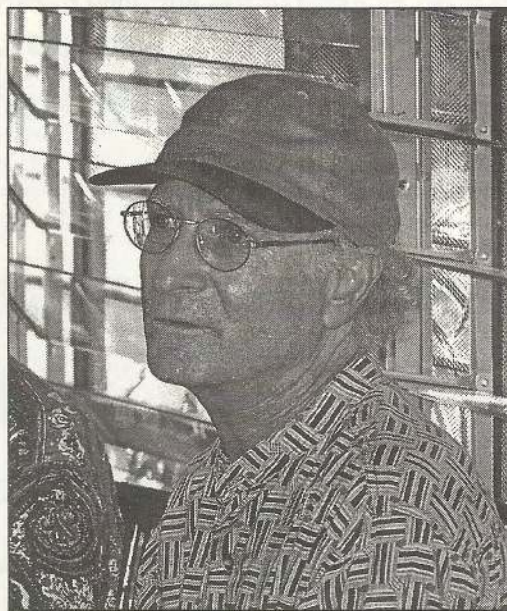
But as we call Her in to do what we can't, I believe it is also essential to work on consciously improving group process and communication skills, building new decision-making structures that help us heal and move on. For example, there is a real need for an integral visioning body. The present Working Committee and Council are essentially bodies which focus on maintaining 'what is' rather than exploring future possibilities. I also see the need for the community to have its own 'outside' support body, inviting people from the global community to serve as consultants, advisors and advocates in a true inside-outside collaboration.

At the same time, I believe we

need to redefine ourselves as a learning society, to see ourselves as being a 'univer-city', not just a city. For if we view ourselves as a laboratory whose aim is to develop a 21st century curriculum for sustainable transformation, then everything we do here – including the way we meet and make decisions – becomes a living educational process.

In spite of and through all the difficulties and contradictions I've seen here, I sense a deep urge in the community to rebuild its collective being, to recover its missing whole. This urge is bubbling up in different forms, like Vision 2012. If we can lend ourselves to that urge, rather than criticizing its first uncertain formulations or giving in to patterns of cynicism and self-doubt, we give Her the chance to happily surprise us.

Based on an interview with Alan



Savitra

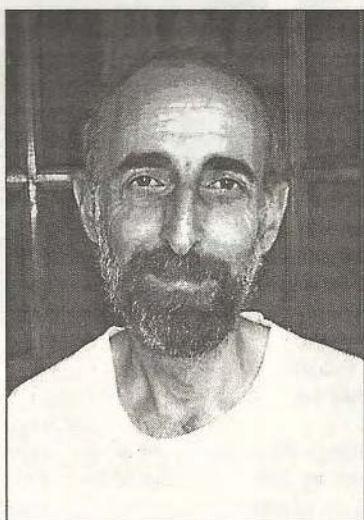
## The Auroville stamp of quality

"We must not get complacent about the good name that we think we have. We need to develop our own Quality Standards," advises Martin Littlewood.

On February 11th, Martin Littlewood, secretary of Auroville International U.K., gave a half-day workshop on 'Quality' to Auroville business executives and other interested persons. Martin is a management consultant for small businesses in the U.K., helping them achieve and maintain the international ISO 9000 and ISO 14001 standards of quality and environmental management.

The idea for the workshop came from a previous visit to Auroville, after an interaction with a few members of the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC). "I saw that there is a push to improve the quality of Auroville products. Many Auroville business executives are concerned about how to move forward. They recognize the need for quality within the unit and the need to improve," says Martin. During this visit he worked closely on quality issues with three of Auroville's business units – Shradhanjali, Auroville Papers and Aureka. "This was a rewarding experience. It gave us all an understanding of the possibilities for improvement."

Defining quality standards is not restricted to the product. The whole production process needs to be looked into. "You can't achieve consistent product quality when there is a poor and inconsistent production process," says Martin. "Ideally, everyone in the unit should take responsibility for quality. It is



Martin Littlewood

not just in the final product – it is the whole process from start to finish."

While Martin acknowledges that the Auroville brand name generally stands for high quality, he believes that some Auroville units could do much better. "In the Auroville boutiques, good quality products are sometimes on the same shelf as bad ones. And Auroville should not sell sub-standard products as a matter of policy." This, he points out, affects the Auroville brand name. "A bad name can spread as quickly as a good name. Auroville simply has to produce the best."

Should Auroville units apply for the ISO 9000 or 14001 certifica-

tions? Martin believes that an ISO accreditation is useful for units that do international business and that some Auroville units might wish to become qualified. But he prefers that Auroville establish its own Auroville Quality Standard. "We could take the appropriate elements of both the ISO 9000 and ISO 14001 standards and include fair-trade practices. Then the ABC, on behalf of Auroville, could encourage all Auroville units, service providers included, to get this accreditation. The Auroville Quality Standard then becomes a brand of excellence."

Martin hopes to be back in Auroville this summer to continue his work.

Priya Sundaravalli

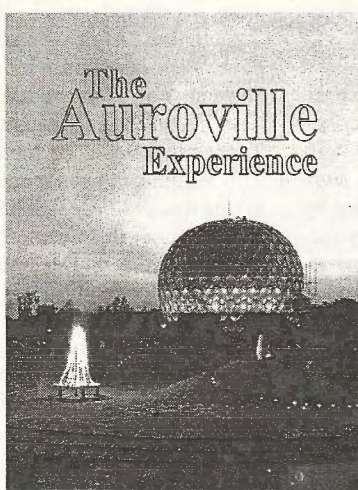
## The Auroville Experience is out!

The Auroville Experience is a 300 page, A4-sized 4-colour coffee table book containing a selection of the best and most informative articles from 202 issues of Auroville Today written between 1988-2005. This unique overview of Auroville's community covers Auroville's beginnings, its inner dimension, the ongoing work at the Matrimandir, the environment, building the city, the organization, business and industry, the economy, the arts and crafts, education, healing mind and body, promoting alternative energies, evolving with the neighbouring villages, life in Auroville and the views of the wider world.

The book is available in the bookshops of Pondicherry and Auroville.

It can also be ordered directly from Auroville Today. Cheques or DD's should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying 'Contribution for Auroville Today – The Auroville Experience'. People living outside India can send their contribution to the Auroville International Centre of their country (see page 8 for details).

Price: India Rs 850, abroad US \$ 28.50 or EU € 25.00. The price includes packing and (air) mailing charges.



## In brief

### Residents' Assembly Meeting

On February 10th, a meeting of the Residents' Assembly attended by about 150 people including 21 guests and newcomers, made decisions on proposals regarding membership of the new Land Consolidation Committee, the Unity Fund, the Entry Regulations and a statement on substance abuse. Proposals were voted upon with abstentions noted.

### Building in the city

The Auroville Planning and Development Council (APDC) and the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) are studying the possibilities of the community building collective housing projects within the city area. Currently architects propose a project and find prospective residents to finance the project, which gives the clients a strong say in the design of the accommodation and a sense of personal ownership. The APDC proposes that in future such projects are pre-financed by the community and housing is only allocated once the accommodation is ready.

### Maintenance disparities

The disparity between salaries paid to commercial unit executives and to Aurovilians working for community services was discussed in meetings of the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC), the Economy Group and the FAMC. Some ABC representatives are not comfortable adopting guidelines or ceilings, but instead propose collective agreements or self-regulation. The Economy Group is opposed to the increasing gap which is partly hidden as some personal expenses are accounted as business expenses. This also affects the contribution to be paid by the unit to Auroville. The issue is not yet resolved.

### Maintenance adjustments

The Economy Group plans to increase the maintenances of all of those working full time for Auroville (generally 35 hours or more per week) and who have no adequate level of support. It will also, in the interests of fairness and transparency, eliminate a few schemes that are no longer considered justifiable, such as the "Circle experiment" and the provision of "additional (flexible) maintenance". Also the lunch subsidy will be gradually eliminated. The adjustments will take effect from February 1st onwards.

### Central Fund Contributions Policy

The FAMC has endorsed a policy proposal by the Economy Group that individuals who do not contribute to Auroville through work should at least contribute the minimum monthly Central Fund contribution of Rs 1800/month. The FAMC also stated that Auroville should not become a place for people to retire, or for rich people to only contribute financially, but that Auroville is about working for the community.

### Selection Committee

The Selection Committee, a group of elected Aurovilians formed to propose candidates for the Working Committee and Auroville Council and fill vacancies in these bodies, has requested in a General Meeting that Auroville's internal organisation, including the way that key-groups like the Working Committee, the Council and the Selection Committee itself are mandated and selected, is revised.



# Living with optimism

Intense, dynamic and earnest – meet Elumalai of the Auroville bakery.

It is 3.30 on the dot when Elumalai sails in on his white racer bicycle. There had been a note of efficiency in his voice as we set up the time for the interview. "I hope you haven't been waiting too long," he says as he walks up, settling himself briskly in a chair.

There is an earnest and intense quality about Elumalai, who for the past five years has been one of the executives of the Auroville bakery. "That's just a title for convenience. I work just like the others," he says with a disarming smile. A picture of efficiency behind the bakery counter, he exudes a quicksilver energy, seeming to be everywhere at once. Ready to help before the asking he recommends the day's specials, wraps orders up and prepares the bill – all in a blink of an eye.

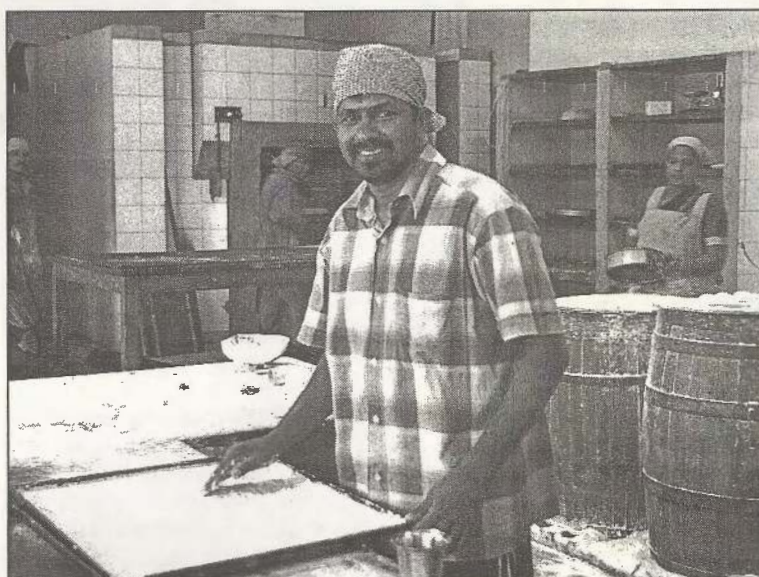
Elumalai has been with the bakery for the past 9 years and has seen it all – accounts, production, sales and even baking. He takes pride in the place. "I would easily rank us amongst the best in India," he says. He hopes that one day he can visit some other fine bakery in the world, "to see how people work differently and learn new things" to bring back to Auroville. "Already we're very good, but I am sure we can be better," he adds.

It's not just the bakery that occupies Elumalai now. Recently he became a father. He and wife Sarasu have a baby boy, Maneeshwar. "I never knew I could be this happy; it's

something I can't express. I was happy before, but this is a different happiness."

Elumalai comes from the neighbouring village of Kuilapalayam. His mother still lives in the village. "I was probably 5 when I first came to New

to study well to be able to go to college. So I left. Then the Government school got more expensive and I saw that mother was suffering, going out to work for me. And that was unacceptable – I love my mother too much." Determined to reduce her bur-



Elumalai

Creation School," he says. "My sister was working at Fraternity, and I was curious about this school on the other side of the road." After a few weeks, little Elumalai returned to the village school.

"It did not offer certificates," he explains, "and my mother wanted me

den, Elumalai decided to go to the 'no-certificate school' at New Creation, and make a success of it.

He vividly remembers his first day. "We had English in the first hour and Mani was the teacher. He told us that we had to introduce ourselves." Not knowing how to speak English,

Elumalai panicked. "I could read and write a bit but to speak was impossible. I prayed that my turn wouldn't come, but it did. I don't know what happened – I got up and blurted, 'He don't know English,' and the whole class began to laugh. But Mani was kind; he told them all to be quiet and gently corrected my mistake." That experience made Elumalai even more determined to work and learn as much as he could.

And he did at New Creation School, Last School and After School. "I had some very caring teachers in Auroville and it's because of them that I am happy today," he reminisces. "Especially Jothi. On Sundays I'd be playing marbles by the temple trying to hide as he passed by on his cycle, but he'd always catch me. He would bring me to Last School, open the library for me, and select a book for me to read. He insisted that I speak in English everywhere I saw him – and I am grateful to him to this day. He was more than a teacher; he was my Guru."

Elumalai went on to pass the 10th and 12th standard examinations from After School. "Without the help of After School, I'd never have made it to college," he says. Elumalai qualified for a Bachelors degree in Business Administration from Chidambaram University. "The day I got my degree, my mother was so happy. It had always been her dream that at least one of her children should

be educated," he says. "I wanted to continue my studies but I felt I needed to concentrate on work in Auroville." He became an Aurovilian along the way. "I didn't have to go through the entry group or attend any meeting. When I finished After School, one of my friends came and congratulated me saying I'd become an Aurovilian. 'What is an Aurovilian?' I asked. He told me about Auroville, the Charter, my rights and my responsibilities... it all came naturally."

So how has life been in Auroville? "Very busy!" he replies smiling broadly. "It still is. And now with the baby, it is even busier." Regardless, he is lookout to occupy the time he is free in the afternoon with another job.

But it's not all work for this dynamic young father. He still finds time to play the hoops at the basketball courts, and also indulge in some adventure cycling. "If you do anything good here, you will always find the support," he says. He narrates an experience that his team of cyclists had in Auroville. "Five of us had planned a 35-day long-distance trip to the Ellora Caves; it was to cost us about 30,000 rupees; but we had only a quarter of the money between us. So we decided to fundraise. Everyone was pessimistic but I said 'Sure, we'll get it, and we were.'"

Now he cherishes the dream of cycling all the way to Nepal and back. "One day when there is more time..."

Priya Sundaravalli

## DEVELOPING A GIFT ECONOMY

### Giving unconditionally

Tsunami, the little cloth doll, has come to represent unconditional self-giving and dynamic, creative energy.

Tsunami's 1st anniversary party was organized by the 200 women from the six fishing villages involved in the Women's Livelihood project. It was a day-

long Tamil-style festivity at the local marriage hall for everyone from the villages and Auroville.

Tsunami is a small doll made from waste cloth – supplied by Auroville's garment units – made by the women of the tsunami affected villages in the Auroville area. Shortly after the tsunami struck, Tsunami fulfilled a need for creative

expression and was method of healing from the traumas caused by the tsunami. Soon it became a livelihood project, offering Rs. 500/- to 2000/- a month to each of the 200 women involved. But then something unexpected happened.

"Initially, we thought of making a doll and selling it, but we soon found it was meaningless to put a price on such an emotionally charged product," says Uma. "Then we decided to gift the dolls, and leave it to the receiver to make a donation in return." The responses have been beyond anybody's expectation. "Tsunami has become the symbol of what we call the 'gift economy'," says Uma. "The project will soon become self-sustaining. So far it was funded by 'Concern World-Wide', it won't need any further funding. The money that has been generated is now being channelled into a revolving fund run by the women for the women. And more women from other villages are waiting to join."

Uma emotionally speaks about how Tsunami has been received by people across the world. "She has been sent to 50 nations! Tsunami festivals are being organized in Spain and Italy, and the project team from

Auroville has received invitations to visit Europe in connection with Tsunami. The National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), India's most prestigious academic and research body on fashion, has used Tsunami

as its theme for its 2006 calendar. Amnesty International has ordered 15,000 Tsunamis to celebrate Women's Day. To date we have produced 400,000 Tsunamis. The plan is to make one million and the end is not in sight – one billion seems a

more realistic number now!" Uma is clearly overwhelmed. "When we started the project I thought that Tsunami's life would be a year maximum. But she has not only survived, she continues to spread goodwill and energy far beyond our imaginations! It's unbelievable."

Uma recalls a visit of business graduates who wondered what they could do for Tsunami. "After we explained the project to them, they came up with a proposal that 26th December be Tsunami day. When a new business venture is inaugurated that day, a Tsunami would be handed to all attendees. This would carry the message of unconditional giving that this little doll has come to represent." In keeping this idea Bangalore observed Tsunami day on December 26th last year.

The 'unconditional gift' aspect of Tsunami has also had an unexpected effect on the project team. Says Uma, "We came to realize that a different economy is possible, one of giving freely. Is this perhaps what The Mother wanted for Auroville when she spoke about 'no-exchange of money'?"

Priya Sundaravalli

### Filling bellies...touching hearts...

The new Indus Valley café at Bharat Nivas experiments with a novel idea of sharing.

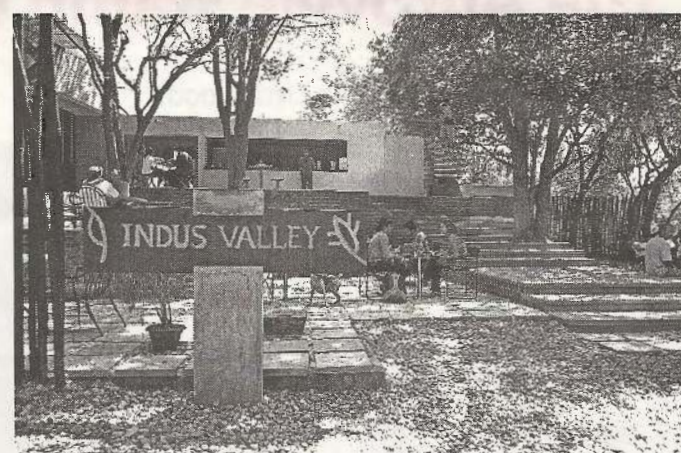
It's an unusual 'Indian' zen at Bharat Nivas. Giant terracotta pots slumber besides black bamboo screens, and granite grinding stones sit amidst the grey-pebbled ground. A tree rustles, stippling shadows over the sprawling courtyard sprinkled with tables of blue-orange Athangudi tiles. A lilting Urdu melody streams out its love-laden notes as the aromas of an Indian kitchen curl out with the afternoon breeze.

The Indus Valley café made its debut in Auroville on 1st January 2006; one more addition to the growing list of eateries in Auroville. What is unusual about this one is its policy on pricing – there is none! "If you like, you contribute for the next person who may eat after you," says Dhruv, one of the creators of the space. "Actually we hope that Aurovilians will contribute in other ways – like cooking, serving and even eating here occasionally."

This unusual concept he says is not as novel as it appears to be. He explains that ancient India did not have the concept of selling food. "To put a price on food was considered vulgar. Food was always an offering – a basic amenity. Even now if you are travelling or visiting someone, people would offer and share food with you even if they didn't know you."

The concept of the Indus Valley café unfolded gradually. "The Kalakendra building was initially planned to be a restaurant," explains Dhruv. "But over the years, it morphed into an art centre and gallery. And to have a café to complement an art gallery was irresistible!"

With almost 15 eateries now in Auroville, isn't yet another one unnecessary? "Not at all," he answers. "The International Zone has no



The Indus Valley café

such facility and there is a need in this area, especially with some exhibition or the other going on here or at the Tibetan pavilion, performances at the auditorium, or other activities happening constantly at Bharat Nivas."

Serving simple home-style vegetarian Indian food with a daily lunch buffet, the café caters to a niche market. "The menu does not compete with other restaurants in Auroville," says Dhruv. Food is prepared by Geetha, an Aurovilian from the Kutch area of Gujarat who specializes in Gujarati food, and Maharaj Ganpath from Rajasthan. "Maharaj is the title bestowed to highly respected chefs."

On the economics of the experiment, Dhruv believes that it is too early to comment. "We have had people who have given a couple of hundred rupees for a cup of tea; we also have people who contribute according to the approximate material value of food... and then we have people who are supporting us even if they don't come regularly. We know that somewhere the idea shakes people up; even we find it difficult to detach our minds from evaluating the food that is consumed in terms of money. And that will take some time. But as an idea, people tell us it is very close to what Auroville should be!"

Priya Sundaravalli



# The Hypochondriac

Moliere's 'Le Malade Imaginaire', or The Hypochondriac, is a play about deception and the need to rely upon reason rather than succumbing to paranoia, cant and quackery. In this sense, it anticipates The Enlightenment, although its sometimes rumbustious, scatological humour recalls an earlier age.

Written in 1673, its theme is extremely topical for it highlights the role of medicine in creating illness and dependency. It was tragically ironic that at the conclusion of the fourth performance Moliere, who was playing the hypochondriac, collapsed on stage. He died the next day refusing, to the end, to take the pills the doctors prescribed.

The Hypochondriac tells the story of a man, Monsieur Argan, who is convinced that he has every disease under the sun. He is encouraged in this belief by his unscrupulous doctor and his unscrupulous wife, both of whom are after his money. The hypochondriac, in a moment of inspiration, decides to marry his daughter to a young would-be doctor so that he can have medical attention around the



The grouchy, neurotic M. Argan (Otto) trekkled all over by his unscrupulous wife (Loretta)

clock. However, the intended husband is both a dolt and an adherent of the old school – "I don't believe in all this circulation of the blood" – and the daughter is in love with somebody else.

The denouement sees the lovers

united and a 'cured' M. Argan being invested as a doctor himself in a mock ceremony. Merely by donning the hat of the medical faculty, he is told, folly becomes wisdom and gibberish is transformed into learning.

The two performances of the play

at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium were a success. Otto was superb as the grouchy, neurotic M. Argan, as was Afsaneh, the well-intentioned maid with the whiplash tongue. Loretta trekkled all over her unsuspecting husband, while Anandamayi and Jesse mooned and groaned as the temporarily star-crossed lovers. Their bliss was threatened by the dumbest doctor on the planet, very ably played by Krishna.

The moment that brought the house down – and M. Argan to his knees – came when M. Argan's doctor (Peter Holl), washing his hands of his patient, told him in blood-curdling detail how one affliction would follow another on the downward path to death.

Home-grown Auroville productions tend to require generous audiences; there are always a few actors who can't be heard or understood, or are indistinguishable from blocks of wood. This was almost the first production I have seen where there were no weak links and the level of playing was good to excellent. Much of the credit for this should go to Ellen's sensitive direction.

Alan

## CELEBRATION

### A special evening at the Youth Centre

On the 21st of February a special dinner, open to all, was served at the Youth Centre.

It was bustling with people of all age groups and walks of life. As we entered, we were led deep into the forest, down a winding path lined with candles, until we came to a clearing. We were then served an assortment of different salads, gazpacho and bread with a variety of excellent spreads as well as barbecued chicken and shown to low 'stained glass' tables, where candles flickered and fragrant transformation flowers had been strewn.

All around, an interesting installation by the Infinity Three had been put up: immaculate sheets of white paper suspended from branches or pinned into vertical metal rods planted into the ground.

Two screens had also been put up, where beautiful images of nature, as well as scenes from the film Microcosm, were projected, while soft fusion music played.

We were then led to the desert lounge, where people sat around on straw mats on the ground, in diffused light and served fruit salad and excellent chocolate truffles of different flavors.

The Youth Centre pulsed with life while different generations interacted and enjoyed themselves. What the young organizers, with their vibrant energy, offered the community that night was unique and brought people together.

Emmanuelle



PHOTO CAREL

## NEW BOOKS

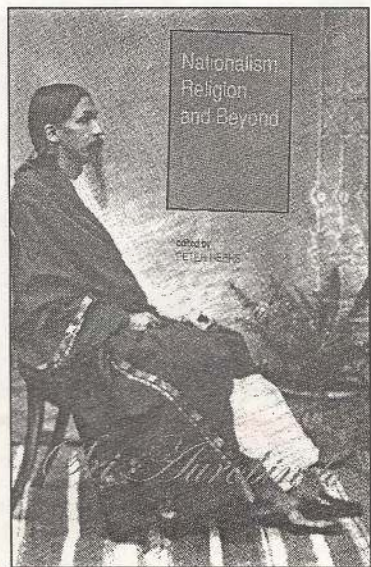
### Nationalism, Religion and Beyond

By Peter Heehs

Sri Aurobindo is best known as a spiritual philosopher and yogi, the author of such works as *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*, and the founder of the ashram in Pondicherry that bears his name. But Sri Aurobindo's writings in the fields of political, social and cultural theory are little known and are not given the attention they deserve. In *Nationalism, Religion and Beyond* Peter Heehs, a scholar and biographer of Sri Aurobindo, provides an anthology of Sri Aurobindo's major writings on these subjects. Heehs' 40-page introduction where he explains why these writings are not, or not sufficiently, considered, and against what historical background they need to be read, is vital to the book.

One reason for the neglect, writes Heehs, is that many of Sri Aurobindo's early political writings are now out of date. Another reason is that the later books and essays, concerned with more enduring themes, were written in the context of the political realities

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Readers who wish to apply Sri Aurobindo's insights to contemporary problems



have to extract them from their historical contexts, for which a certain amount of historical knowledge is required. Heehs warns that this

understanding is conspicuously lacking in many of those who put themselves forward as Sri Aurobindo's champions and who mine his writings for quotations that are applied, out of context, to their own social or political agendas.

Another problem in making use of Sri Aurobindo's writings today, says Heehs, is that the political, social and intellectual worlds have changed enormously since he wrote. Words central to Sri Aurobindo's thinking such as "culture" and "evolution" are used today in a different sense than a hundred years ago. Other terms, such as "cultural nationalism" and "nationalism", have negative connotations today that they did not have in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Sri Aurobindo's concepts and some of terminology have to be "translated" into twenty-first century idioms.

Heehs writes that another reason for the neglect is the uncritical enthusiasm that some of Sri Aurobindo's champions are displaying. This, writes Heehs, might

be appropriate for religious propaganda but not for academic and public debate. To treat his books on these subjects as quasi-scriptural revelations is to condemn them to irrelevance.

A final reason why Sri Aurobindo's political and social philosophy has not had the influence it deserves is that it does not exist in a compact, systematic form. To gain an adequate understanding, one has to go through eight or more volumes of his *Complete Works*.

The purpose of the anthology is to remedy these difficulties. The anthology provides a brief but representative selection drawn from ten volumes of Sri Aurobindo's *Complete Works*, from the period 1893 to 1949. The book is recommended reading for all those who want to understand Sri Aurobindo's views on these subjects.

Carel

*Nationalism, Religion and Beyond*  
by Peter Heehs  
Published by Permanent Black  
Distributed by Orient Longman

## In brief

### Nicholas Roerich's paintings

The Pavilion of Tibetan Culture hosted an exhibition of reproductions of Nicholas Roerich's paintings. The exhibition was inaugurated by Lt. Gen. (Retd) M.M. Lakhera, Lieutenant-Governor of Pondicherry, by Mr. Vladislav Antonyuk, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Chennai, as the Guest of Honour.

### The Mother's Care

A collection of unusual photographs of the Mother, along with some things used by Her was exhibited at the Savitri Bhavan. Also two videos were shown, 'The Mother: Glimpses of her life' and 'Four Aspects of the Mother.'

### Auroville Museum of Archaeology

The Auroville Museum of Archaeology organized a slideshow presentation of recent excavations in Paderborn, Germany (100 BC – 1800 AD) presented by Dr. Sven Spiong and his team of archaeologists from Germany on the archaeological work in Auroville since 1975. There was also an "Open House" on the site of the present rescue excavation between Shradhanjali and the Centre for Scientific Research.

### Dynamised water

On February 9th the Auroville Pure Water Project and the people of Ganagachettikulam village next to Eternity inaugurated a post-tsunami dynamised water installation providing 10,000 litres of pure water per day.

### Bronze Workshop

The Auroville-Tamil Heritage Centre has conducted a 3-day workshop cum display and demonstration of Chola Bronzes of Tami Nadu with particular reference to the Swamimalai School. The course was given by leading artist Stapathi S. Rajan and his students at Ilaigarkal School, Saaram community. Bronze moulding, casting and finishing processes were demonstrated on site.

### South Indian Equestrian Championship 2006

The 'Red Earth Riding School' hosted the South India Equestrian Championships for schools from February 17 to 19. Sixty horses from seven clubs participated in the tournament which was inaugurated by Lt. Governor M.M. Lakhera. Apart from competitions in dressage and show-jumping, spectators could watch cross country and derby events.

### Ikebana demonstration

A lecture and demonstration of the Japanese Art of Flower Arrangement was held at the Tibetan Pavilion by Valeria, an Aurovilian. All plant materials used in the making of the 15 very different arrangements were grown in the Auroville area.

### Baby sitter service starts

The Blue Berry children's library in Kailash is now also the contact address for the baby sitter service, which provides a service run by people trained in the basic needs and cares of the small child.



# Celluloid dreaming in Auroville

Was naming Auroville's new media centre Cinema Paradiso an inspired piece of marketing or a case of transformational thinking?

The Giuseppe Tornatore film of the same name was a heartwarming, sentimental look at one man's love affair with film. The story follows Salvatore, a fatherless child in a small 1950s Sicilian town, who absconds with the milk money to buy admission to his local movie theatre, named Cinema Paradiso.

He develops a close friendship with the middle-aged projectionist, Alfredo, who mentors him in life, love and the philosophy of running a movie theatre. The local priest previews each movie before public consumption, using his moral authority to insist that scenes of kissing be edited out. He also patrols the public screenings, keeping an eagle eye on the behaviour of the audience and whacking over-excited boys causing havoc.

Could Auroville's Cinema Paradiso, situated in the new Town Hall complex, ever approximate the social hub that was the Sicilian town's movie theatre? So far, no locking of lips has been sighted in the new cinema, but the extremely comfortable reclining seats may have their effects in time. However, the seats' noisy snap-shut tendency, when a viewer moves too quickly from reclining to upright position, is startling on first encounter and will

surely prove an obstacle to any romantic endeavours. After threatening the loss of a few Aurovilian limbs, viewers are learning not to sit up rapidly in response to dramatic narrative developments on screen.

As for our own cinema becoming a social hub, the adjoining town hall cafeteria offers a double incentive to head to this part of town for an evening's entertainment. A recent night out included a lively troupe of Breton musicians performing to a brimming café, followed by Mad Hot Ballroom, an engaging documentary about the travails of disadvantaged children in New York City taking part in a ballroom dancing competition.

Other recent offerings include the Humphrey Bogart classic Casablanca, the 1970s version of Siddhartha, an early Stanley Kubrick film from the archives, a Bob Dylan documentary, and a festival of films by and about the seminal Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa.

But let's hope that Auroville's new cinema doesn't meet the fate of the imagined cinema in Tornatore's film, which burns down. An adolescent Salvatore takes over the job of projectionist when the new cinema opens, but many things have changed. The priest has lost his power to censor kissing – either on-screen or in the audience, as the

increasingly liberal moral climate of the '60s sets in.

At the film's end, Salvatore returns to his home town as a middle-aged man for Alfredo's funeral, and receives a film montage the old man has bequeathed to him. It shows all the kisses censored from the movies shown at the Paradiso over the years, stirring Salvatore to confront the lack of depth in his personal life.

Would an Auroville equivalent of censored films amount to much? A broad range of films are generally on offer these days, but Mother had strong views concerning cinema at the Ashram, and permitted movies: "not as an amusement but as part of education". But she admitted the notion of educational movies was a problematic one, where stories of war and murder "go under the name of history". Mother said she wanted to: "show the children pictures of life as it should be, but we have not reached that point yet."

But Mother also conceded that shielding people from the world was ineffective, and pointed to Sri Aurobindo's remedy, saying: "We must face life as a whole, with all the ugliness, falsehood and cruelty it still contains, but we must take care to discover in ourselves the source of all goodness, all beauty, all light and all truth, in order to being this source



PHOTO CORILAN

consciously into contact with the world so as to transform it."

Given Mother's statement, it seems Auroville's Cinema Paradiso is well on track, offering an adequately diverse programme for Aurovilians to come 'consciously into contact with the world'. Whether the movie programme inspires Aurovilians to transform the world remains open to question, but the transformative power of cinema for the individual cannot be ignored.

For who doesn't remember the first time they sat in a cinema, eagerly awaiting the lights to dim? There's always been a certain magic associated with the simple act of pro-

jecting a movie onto a screen, and young Salvatore's experiences in the movie theatre perfectly depict the power of the journey of internal discovery via film. By connecting with his story, the audience is thus inspired to recall their own personal meanings of life.

Let's hope our own Cinema Paradiso offers this scope for Aurovilians – another method for internal journeying and for raising collective consciousness. For as we know, the end of the movie is often not really the end, but an opportunity to imagine new beginnings.

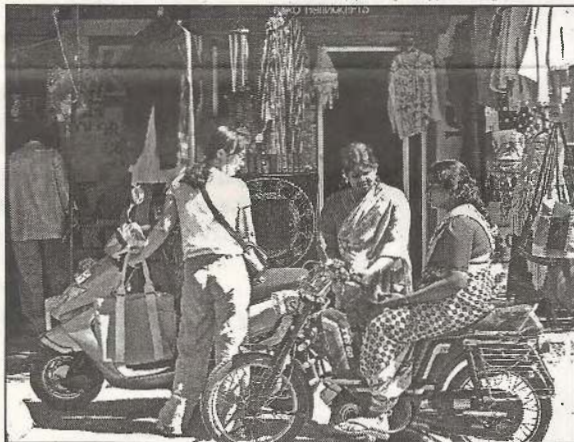
THE END!

Lesley

## NEIGHBOURHOOD

# Kuilapalayam High Street

PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI



Kuilapalayam high street is like a scene from a Wild West movie with ramshackle stalls lining the dusty road and cows and dogs and cats wandering about or sleeping spread out in the sun. It is somehow calm and chaotic, old and new, all at the same time, like the mixture that is modern India. Sometimes I sit for hours outside the Om Shakti cafe listening to the dough being pounded for parottas and the family quarrelling and watch the drama of this little street, a microcosm of India and tourism; everyone trying to earn a living, find a bargain, and pass the time.

The only cafe with proper chairs and tables outside was run into by a truck and the police will not allow outdoor seating anymore, so now you have to balance on a plastic stool or an oil drum for your glass of hot sweet tea. At one end of the street is the "fully com-

puterized" Bank of India complete with colourful Ganesh shrine, and at the other end a stall selling chickens, live or dressed, while the victims wait patiently in a pile of hot feathers in their cages. There are at least two

the hazardous ride to Pondy anymore. The fruit stall sells you bananas and vegetables and toilet rolls and aspirins, the four money changers will keep you in cash flow, the Deepa Laundry will wash (where, how?) your clothes and iron them with an ancient charcoal filled iron in front of his little stall. Your clothes can be made, mended and altered by one of the five tailors and sometimes you can even get your petrol in an orange juice bottle from the stall next door.

and even brown hair colouring. There are three Kashmiri jewellers now; they are very different from the Tamil men with their sharp features and darting eyes, always on the lookout for a customer to tempt with their gorgeous jewellery, though their bargaining skills are formidable. Haji Ali Sheik tells me his family has dealt in semi precious stones for three generations but due to the conflict in Kashmir the tourist trade had dried up so he has come south to make a living. He chose Kuilapalayam as he could eat here for twenty rupees a day, much cheaper than Pondy. He goes back to Kashmir every few years, if he can afford it, and says life is very good for him.

Sarojina came here from Orissa as a bride for Ramachandra ten years ago, didn't know a word of English and was terrified of riding a bicycle. She now runs a gaily decorated gift and clothes shop,

speaks very good English and zips around on a scooter. Her husband works at the Visitors' Centre and is currently taking a computer course in Pondy and they are building their own house in Kottakarai. They are a good example of Indians who came here with nothing and have used the opportunities Auroville has presented them with.

The road through the village was repaired six months ago but already the holes are reasserting themselves and the dust reclaiming everything. It gets an enormous amount of wear from the taxis, trucks, motorbikes and cycles and bullock carts and huge tour buses on their way to gawp at Matrimandir. They all bump through on their way to and from Auroville, hopefully stopping to buy some biscuits or bananas en route. Every year the row of shops gradually creeps further up the road towards Auroville; more bright flapping clothes, more money shops, more jewellery, gadgets and gifts for the visitors.

And now it is growing upwards, with a smart two storey concrete building that is rumoured to be another bank. The street really now exists for the visitors and clamours for their trade before the four hot, dead, months come round again. Then the Kashmiris will be off to the Himalayas, some shops give up completely and close down, the rest watch their fruit slowly rot in the heat. But they know by August the tourists will be back, hungry and needy, and the street will blossom once again into colour and chaos.

Dianna

PHOTO CORILAN



Snapshots of Kuilapalayam high street

dozen shops on the street now, the two latest selling mobile phones and computers and advertising all the latest technology.

Kuilapalayam takes care of all your needs and wants these days; no need for

A sophisticated addition is the Kado gift shop run by a French Aurovilian where you can get goodies such as Swiss chocolate, deodorants,



PHOTO PRIYA SUNDARAVALLI

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